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Inside front cover



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CONTENTS

COMPLETE NOVEL

- SHADOWS TREMENDOUS,** *Burt L. Standish* 1
Secret-service agent of the United States tackles the job of blocking Oriental schemes in Mexico.

COMPLETE NOVELETTES

- UNSAINTLY IN SANTA FE,** *William Wallace Cook* 127
A little blue rain god leads a lot of speculators in a merry dance.
THE GUILF OF KING MAGOO, *Will Gage Carey* 184
Baseball in the Southern Seas, with a laugh or two.

SHORTER STORIES

- NOT CIVILIZED,** *William Carlton Davis* 49
Remarkable story of an ape, and the inability of men to understand his character.
THE TRUDGEON STROKE, *Olin L. Lyman* 93
An amateur life-saver gets a few points from stirring experience.
UNDER THE OLD SPELL, *Francis J. Dickie* 103
How the lure of the news is ever irresistible to the old newspaper man.
HIST! A SPY! *Armiger Barclay* 120
Comedy side of war times abroad.
OVER THE NET, *Frances Wilson* 153
Tennis, with some playing of an older game.
HE SAID IT, *Edward F. Power* 178
What happened after a driver had talked too much about his engine.

SERIAL NOVELS

- WRITTEN SO THAT YOU CAN START READING ALL OF THEM IN THIS NUMBER
PERIL INVISIBLE, *Albert M. Treynor* 65
In Three Parts—Part III.
Powerful drama of the munitions industry.
BENEATH THE SPARKLING TURBAN, *Alan Fox* 163
In Three Parts—Part II.
Stirring adventures in the Far East.
THE PRAIRIE SHARK, *John Holden* 204
In Three Parts—Part I.
A bit of get-rich-suddenly business in Canadian real estate. Watch the little building lot.

SPECIAL ARTICLE

- BUILDING A BALL CLUB,** *George T. Stallings* 59
In a talk with John N. Wheeler, the manager of the Boston National League team discusses the kind of players he wants on a pennant-winning journey.

MISCELLANEOUS

- THERE AND HERE,** *Edgar Chippendale* 48
How to keep cheerful and cool.
STRIKE NOTHING! *Arthur E. Scott* 64
An argument at the home plate.
JUST BLARNEY, *Anna Marble* 102
Listen to Nora the shy.
RIDERS OF THE RANGE, *C. S. M.* 151
A glimpse at the Northwest Mounted.
THE REASON WHY, *C. Kryz Wright.* 152
When a man may cry like a baby.
TOP-NOTCH TALK, *The Editor* 220
Bad Stories by Good Authors.

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TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

VOL. XXVII

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No. 4



A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

THE MESSAGE FROM WHERE?

GETTING up from the desk to stretch his legs a little, Knowlton Darrell glanced regretfully at the clock set amid the wilderness of dials and coils, shining spirals of copper pipe, and all the other complicated paraphernalia which covered the wall of the wireless room.

It was after midnight. He knew that he should be starting back to his hotel, for Bellamy's place was out on the Ocean Boulevard, and cars were uncertain quantities at this time of night; but he was oddly reluctant to depart.

18

It was not that the evening had brought him anything exciting, or even mildly interesting. On the contrary, the messages stolen from the air by the two wireless eavesdroppers had so far been ordinary and humdrum to a degree.

Darrell had not even troubled to take down the majority of them, and the soft pad before him was blank, save for the opening words of half a dozen messages which had sounded good to begin with, but had quickly trailed off into meaningless phrases.

Nevertheless, the young man was still disinclined to leave. He was expecting nothing in particular, waiting for nothing special. It had been simply a desire for relaxation and diversion which

had caused him to spend so many of his free evenings in this room under the roof, where his wealthy San Francisco friend had fitted up a wonderfully complete private wireless station. That, at least, was how it had started; but swiftly the idle diversion had developed into something of enthralling interest and gripping fascination.

There was an uncertainty about it, an element of dramatic surprise which appealed to a man of Darrell's temperament. From every side, from far and near, those magical waves were caught by the complicated apparatus, and transformed into crackling, intelligible language, which but for its commonplace import might have been the gossiping chat of unseen gods. Then suddenly, in the midst of all this commonplace jangle, might sound a new vibration to set the listener's nerves tingling with the thrill or interest of its import.

It might be a call for help coming faintly but insistently across ocean leagues. Twice in a single week the two friends had been startled by the ominous, galvanic signal "S. O. S." More often, however, it was apt to be something from much nearer at hand. More than once a single word or a brief sentence in code sent or received within a few miles of him had roused Darrell's interest to a white heat.

On one occasion he had gleaned information in this manner which proved to be of the greatest value in his profession—information which could have been obtained in absolutely no other way. It was scarcely surprising, therefore, that he was reluctant to unclasp the double telephone receiver from his ears, and depart. The very dullness of the messages he had listened to so far that evening made him oddly sure that something of compensating interest would come if he only waited long enough.

For ten minutes, at least, there had

been a total cessation of vibrations in the receiving apparatus before him. The room was very still; only the strident ticking of the clock and Bellamy's rather heavy breathing broke the unnatural silence. Glancing at his friend, Darrell smiled. Evidently Bellamy had become discouraged, and lost interest in the game, for his head rested against the chair back, and he had fallen into a doze.

Presently the buzzing dots and dashes made Darrell straighten for an instant into keen attention. It was only Salt Lake City, however, sending a private message to a San Francisco broker, and the young man sank back again, a flicker of disappointment crossing his clean-cut, forceful face.

It was annoying to have his last evening at this fascinating game such a dull one. His work in San Francisco was practically finished, and he was only waiting instructions from the head of the secret-service bureau, at Washington, before taking his departure. He had been expecting those orders all day. They certainly could not be delayed more than a few hours longer.

The operator at Salt Lake continued to send private messages. They were all uninteresting, and Darrell followed them absently, his thoughts almost entirely on the question of where he would be sent next. It might be any one of half a dozen widely separated locations he had in mind.

"At any rate, he'll probably want me to come on to Washington first," the secret-service agent reflected. "That'll be one comfort. It's a good four months since I——"

He broke off abruptly, and his fingers gripped the pencil as his keen ear suddenly detected a new vibration in the receiver. The Salt Lake operator was still sending, but the pitch and timbre of these new sounds told Darrell instantly that a second totally different machine had begun to work.

For an instant he sat listening intently. Then a gleam of interest flashed into his eyes, his left hand shot out to one of the numerous dials before him, and in a second the one particular set of clicking dots and dashes leaped out clear and distinct, while all other sounds died away to a faint murmur.

The action roused Bellamy, who straightened up, blinking. "Got something?" he inquired, with a yawn.

Darrell nodded briefly. His pencil was gliding over the paper before him. There was a faint frown on his wide forehead. Bellamy readjusted the head-piece, which had slipped down a little from his ears, and sat listening in silence.

Presently he shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "Cipher," he commented, in a low tone.

Darrell did not answer. The words had not been uttered loud enough to reach his ears. He went on writing rapidly. Then followed a brief pause, during which he sat silent, waiting for a reply. It came swiftly, merely a perfunctory repetition of the message he had taken down. He followed the writing on the pad, making one or two slight corrections, his face still puzzled, his gray eyes full of a keen interest. When the clicking finally ceased he sat staring expectantly at the receiver, as if waiting for something further.

Bellamy yawned, slipped off the head-piece, and stood up, stretching. "Any code we know?" he inquired, bending over Darrell's shoulder to look at the pad.

The secret-service agent shook his head. "I think not. It looks a bit familiar in spots, as if it were made up of two or three different codes, but I'll have to look over my books to make sure."

Bellamy ran the fingers of one hand through his rumpled dark hair, and

frowned over the cipher message which filled nearly the whole of a page.

"Does look sort of rummy," he commented. "*'Dittifico allegro ustora com-pravero—'* Say, *co-npravero* means 'have closed' in the Underwood commercial cipher, doesn't it? I remember running up against that night before last."

"Sure!"

Darrell reached forward, and reversed the dial he had previously turned. The receiver was sounding faintly again; but it proved to be simply an immaterial message from Portland, and, after listening for a moment, the secret-service agent pulled off his headpiece, and laid it down on the table.

"You're quite right, Jack," he agreed, picking up the pad, and resting it on his crossed knees. "There are several other words which look familiar, too, but I'll have to go over it with my copies of the various codes. It's certainly not a government message, for I've got that cipher down pat. Ever heard of this Edwards it's addressed to?"

"Nope. It's a pretty common name. Some traveling man very likely. Humph! Look at the signature—'Levi.' I'll bet the whole thing is nothing but somebody's buying or selling directions."

"That's an S, not an L." Darrell had opened a drawer in the table, and taken out several long, slim code books which he spread out before him. "It's signed Sevi, which is not particularly common or commercial. In fact, I've a notion that it's the man's name reversed."

"Oh! You mean—er—Ives? I see. Still, I can't say that even that touches a responsive chord in my memory. Take my word for it, Dal, it'll turn out to be nothing more than the announcement of a new line of union suits just purchased."

"In cipher?" Darrell shrugged, flicking over the leaves of a book.

"Oh, well," Bellamy yawned, "you know what fool things people turn into cipher. Sometimes I believe they do it just because they think it's smart."

The secret-service agent jotted down a word from the code book. "I dare say they do—sometimes," he returned absently, glancing down the sheet. "I've a hunch this isn't that sort, though. The name Ives plagues me. I've run across it before, but when or where I can't seem to remember. You don't mind if I dope it out now, do you? It won't take long."

"Not a bit," said Bellamy. "Fire away; only you mustn't mind if I go to sleep."

He showed no immediate signs of dozing, however. Drawing his chair closer, he settled down where he could follow the progress of the translation as it appeared word by word on the fresh sheet of paper under Darrell's hand. There was an undoubted fascination in watching one word follow another, and in trying to guess what was coming next. Moreover, the context of the message swiftly began to interest him. After the first brief sentence there was nothing in the least commonplace about it.

Darrell worked rapidly, a faint frown wrinkling his wide forehead. Used as he was to repressing every sign of emotion, those few slight lines showed how greatly he was stirred by the enigma he was unraveling. At length he paused, evidently puzzled by a word which he failed to find in any one of the codes.

"*Cslazaro*," he read aloud. "Wonder if I took that right? Seems as if there ought to be another vowel or two tucked in there some place, doesn't it? C—s—lazaró."

He drawled it slowly, meditately. The last syllable had scarcely passed his lips, however, before he caught his breath swiftly, and a sudden gleam of comprehension leaped into his gray eyes.

"It isn't cipher at all!" he exclaimed abruptly. "It's Cape San Lazaro. By Jove!"

In a flash the silent, dusky room vanished, and he was standing on the deck of a coasting vessel steaming slowly along the western shore of that desolate, almost unknown peninsula of Lower California. A low, gaunt point nosed its way out into the wide, restless Pacific. There were no dwellings there, no life, no speck of green; nothing but arid, burning sand, carved by the wind into fantastic hills and hummocks, torn and beaten by the waves which lapped or rolled or thundered against it year after year with ceaseless monotony.

He had passed a hundred such on the way down the coast, but he remembered some one near him saying, "as he focused his glass upon the desolate wilderness, 'That's San Lazaro.'"

The cape itself was less than nothing, but back of it, across a strip of sand dunes rising swiftly to towering, naked rock, lay Magdalena Bay, the greatest natural harbor in the world. Forty miles long, and over twelve miles in width, it could hold the fleets of the world, and still seem empty. All about it towered massive cliffs lofty enough to shelter the harbor from the fiercest gales.

There were two entrances, neither over five hundred yards in width, and easily made impregnable. Its location within two thousand miles of the Panama Canal, and less than twelve hundred from San Francisco, made it startlingly strategic. In the hands of an unfriendly power, the menace to the United States would be incredible.

Mexico held the sovereign rights over this territory. The harbor lay there unused, unoccupied. It happened, however, that every foot of land around it, and a great deal more beside, was owned by a syndicate of Eastern capitalists, the president of which was the

well-known Harrington Ives, of Philadelphia.

CHAPTER II.

A PERFECT GODSEND.

WHAT the mischief are you staring at?" inquired Bellamy tartly. "Where's this San Lazaro? I've asked you twice."

Darrell came to himself with a start. His face was tense and hard. "It's just outside Magdalena Bay," he returned quickly.

"What!" exclaimed Bellamy, his eyes widening. "You don't mean——"

"I don't mean anything. Just let me finish the rest of this message, and we'll know."

He bent hastily to the task, and for fifteen or twenty minutes not a sound broke the stillness, save the rustle of paper and the intermittent scratch of a pencil. Every trace of lazy indifference had vanished from Bellamy's face, leaving it set in lines of an intense interest, which increased as the meaning of the stolen wireless grew clearer and clearer before his eyes.

Darrell was much more self-restrained, but when at length he laid down his pencil and looked steadily for a second at his friend, his jaw had tightened, and a dull red darkened the healthy tan of his clear skin.

"Read it, won't you?" Bellamy said. "Let's have it from the beginning."

The secret-service agent nodded, picked up the sheet, and read slowly:

"J. J. EDWARDS, *Hotel St. Francis.*

"Deal off with U. S. Have closed with other party. Our terms. Vessels now on their way to Cape San Lazaro. Am hurrying in yacht to meet them. Cannot wait your arrival, but will communicate whenever possible. Do not count on this, however, as yacht wireless radius only one hundred miles. Utmost secrecy necessary. Look to you to keep Washington in dark until occupancy assured.

IVES."

"This Ives represents the syndicate

owning property on the bay?" Bellamy asked, after a momentary silence.

Darrell nodded. "He's the president."

"Did you know they'd offered it to the government?"

"No. I knew they held it at five million, though, which is about one hundred times what they paid for it. If they stuck to that price, I have no doubt the people at Washington refused to be gouged, and turned them down."

"Whereupon they proceed to make overtures to this 'other party,'" added Bellamy; "which means, I suppose——"

"Japan!" exclaimed Darrell, his eyes hard and glinting. "There isn't a doubt in my mind about it. What's more, I'll wager that it was Japan who made the overtures. They want a foothold on this continent; they've wanted it for years. Twice they tried to get concessions from Diaz, but they were turned down. Now they're trying again, and they couldn't have chosen a better time, with Mexico and the United States arrayed against each other. Carranza is at his wits' end for money. Mexico is ready to do anything that will hurt us."

"But if they're paying this syndicate, why fork over to Carranza's government at all?"

"For the privilege of being let alone," Darrell answered quickly. He arose, and began to walk back and forth across the room. There was an unmistakable hint of the athlete in his slim loins and powerful shoulders, no less than in the lithe, springy step. "Private ownership doesn't carry with it the right to fortify," he went on. "They'll want to put up batteries and forts at the two entrances, and on the headland north of the settlement, which will make the bay absolutely impregnable. They couldn't do that without Mexico's permission, tacit or otherwise. You see that, don't you?"

"Certainly. What I don't see is how

they're going to do all this before Uncle Sam gets wise."

"You ought to remember, Jack, that the whole of Lower California—especially the western side—is practically a desert. I don't suppose a boat puts into Magdalena Bay once in three months. They pass by, of course, but the cliffs effectually hide anything from the outside. That's why they're so keen about secrecy at first. They want time to transfer troops and stores and coal and all that kind of thing. In other words, they want to get their grip on the place before Washington wakes up to what's going on."

Bellamy sat silent for a moment; then he chuckled. "It's likely to be something of a shock when the state department lands on their necks with such unexpected promptness. I suppose you'll send a code message to the department at once, telling them what you have discovered?"

Darrell ceased his pacing, and stood looking down on his friend for a moment in silence. It was a good deal of a relief to talk things over with Bellamy. He was a man whose discretion could be absolutely relied on, and, in spite of his wealth and seemingly idle, pleasure-loving habits, his knowledge of underground diplomacy was unusual.

Darrell always said that with the spur of necessity to urge him on, Bellamy would have been more than a credit to the service. He seemed to sense things intuitively, and one did not have to go into lengthy explanations with him, as would be the case with the ordinary individual. In this instance, however, he seemed not to have grasped the vital flaw in the case.

"Just what have I discovered?" the secret-service agent inquired presently, in a rather odd voice.

Bellamy's eyes widened. "I should say you'd found out about all there is to know," he answered. "Japan is evidently——"

"There's no mention whatever of Japan or any other nation in the message," Darrell returned pointedly.

"But surely no one who understands existing conditions can have a shadow of a doubt as to what is meant by the 'other party'?" protested Bellamy, with a frown.

"Quite so," the secret-service agent agreed. "There's no question in your mind or mine. Unfortunately the department requires facts before it can take official action. It will want to know exactly what's going on down at Magdalena Bay. We haven't any facts; we've simply stolen a wireless out of the air. We can't even prove the message is what it seems to be. You catch my drift, don't you?"

"I was a chump not to have seen it before. You'll have to go down there and see what's doing."

"Somebody'll have to go," Darrell returned, with emphasis which was unmistakable.

"Somebody!" repeated Bellamy, wondering. "You don't mean to say that when you wire in your report of what you've discovered they'll think of sending anybody else to get the proofs?"

The secret-service agent jerked his chair round, and faced his companion squarely. His eyes were slightly narrowed, and his whole face hard and tense.

"I think it quite possible. The secretary has not yet returned to Washington. Saltus is in charge, and you know quite well that he has never had much use for me. The chief put me into the service, and has used me many times without taking Saltus into his confidence, which has caused friction. If I wire the details of what I've discovered, it's a two-to-one shot he'll turn the case over to another man."

"But that wouldn't be fair," protested Bellamy, his face flushing angrily. "It's your case, and by every right you ought to have it. Besides, without wasting a

lot of valuable time, who else could he send?"

"Crutchfield is in Portland."

"I'll be hanged if I'd stand for it!" Bellamy burst out hotly. "If I were you, I'd go in spite of him."

"Exactly what I mean to do." The secret-service agent's voice was coolly determined. "If it pans out as I think, it'll be a big thing, and I don't propose to give it up to any one. If I can find a boat sailing to-morrow, I'll take it, and just before I leave I'll wire a complete report to Washington, explaining that I've taken matters into my own hands because I consider the affair too serious to warrant even twenty-four hours' delay. Saltus will rage, and I shall probably be blown sky-high; but if I succeed it won't bother me a whole lot."

"Corking!" Bellamy exclaimed, his eyes shining. "Look here, Dal, I want to go with you."

Darrell stared. "Go with me—you!"

Bellamy flushed a little at his tone. "Why not?" he asked. "I'm bored to death here—even the wireless is getting tiresome. And besides I want to do something real, something worth while. And this is a perfect godsend."

Darrell shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow, don't fool yourself with the idea that this is going to be a pleasure junket. If you knew the Japs as I do, you'd realize they are not the sort to let themselves be thwarted in something they've set out to do by one man or two, or a dozen. They have absolutely no scruples, and the instant they begin so much as to suspect us our lives won't be worth a cigarette. In fact, even if we should think up a perfectly plausible reason for being at Magdalena Bay, it's more than likely they'd do their best to rid the place of us quietly, merely as a matter of precaution."

"I understand that." Bellamy nodded impatiently. "Have you any other rea-

son for not wanting me to go? I mean, is this something which you could accomplish better alone?"

"N-no, I can't say it is. On the contrary, your being along might help in a good many ways; but I should hate very much——"

"Cut it!" interrupted Bellamy decisively. "I'm not going it blind; I know the risks, and I'm ready to take them." He stood up, and drew a long breath of satisfaction. "Well, that's settled," he added quickly. "Have you planned anything yet?"

The secret-service agent shook his head. "Nothing further than to be down at the docks first thing in the morning. There's no regular boat sailing till the first of the week, but we may have luck enough to strike a tramp. Plenty of them leave San Francisco bound for the West Coast."

"But they don't stop at Magdalena Bay, I fancy, especially in times like these."

"So much the better. If we take passage for Panama, say, there's not likely to be any suspicions aroused in case they have some one keeping an eye on outgoing vessels. It'll be easy to fake up a good reason afterward for being put ashore at Magdalena."

"That's true. We'll have three or four days to do it in. You'll stop here to-night, of course, Dal? It'll give us a chance to talk things over a bit, and we'll get away as early as you want in the morning."

Darrell had intended going back to his hotel that night, and straightening out his things there. It was almost two o'clock, however, and after a moment's thought he decided that his friend's plan was the better one.

They wasted no time in tumbling into bed, and little more than four hours later they were up again. At Darrell's suggestion, Bellamy put on a suit of his oldest clothes, and packed a small bag with the barest necessities. What-

ever rôle they finally assumed, a shabby, down-at-the-heel appearance always attracted less attention than any other.

There were no good-bys to delay them. Bellamy simply routed the butler out, informed him that he was leaving for a prolonged trip, and the two friends hurriedly left the house.

It was only a few steps to the terminus of the California Street car line, where they were fortunate enough to find a car waiting. Twenty minutes later they entered the hotel, where Bellamy attended to ordering the breakfast while the secret-service agent hurried to his room.

With the speed of long practice, Darrell threw a few belongings, including a serviceable automatic and several boxes of cartridges, into his bag, slipped his code book into a cleverly hidden slit in the leather lining, and snapped the catch. Then he gathered up his other belongings, and began to tumble them into a small trunk. Boxing gloves and dumb-bells were tossed among the clothes without hesitation, but when he took up a beautifully made pair of foils he paused for a second regretfully.

"Wish I could take you along," he murmured, as he gripped one of them in his slim, muscular fingers, and made a lightning pass or two. "It would liven up the voyage a lot, but I'm afraid they'd hardly be in keeping."

He laid them away with more care than he had shown for anything else, speedily finished his packing, and locked the trunk. He had planned to have it sent to Bellamy's house until their return, and gave instructions to that effect at the desk while settling his account.

It was all accomplished with a methodical speed which had about it no appearance of hurry, and at exactly a quarter past seven they swung aboard a car which deposited them, ten minutes later, on East Street, near the ferry-house.

Within an hour they had secured passage on the *Golden Horn*, a tramp freighter of four thousand tons, Jabez Coffin master, bound for Panama and the West Coast.

CHAPTER III.

STRANGE COMPANIONS.

WHEN Darrell and Bellamy returned to the *Golden Horn* at half past nine, after the former had sent a code message to Washington, they found no traces of bustle and confusion. The last piece of cargo had been stowed, the stevedores had vanished, and the crew, under the direction of the grim-eyed first mate, were engaged in superficially cleaning the deck.

"Looks as if it might not be so bad, after all," Bellamy remarked, as they stopped for a moment to watch proceedings.

Darrell did not answer immediately. He was sizing up the sailors nearest them, and he promptly concluded that he had rarely, if ever, seen such a consistently villainous-looking bunch.

"Hard to tell, Jack," he answered absently. "Of course, we must expect to rough it. I'm more interested in the crew," he went on, in a lower tone. "Did you ever see such a lot of riff-raff, even on a tramp?"

Bellamy shook his head. "Pretty bad," he agreed. "Look as if they'd been scraped up on the Barbary Coast. I suppose, though, you must expect that sort of thing on a ship like this."

"Not always," Darrell returned quickly. "There are lots of vessels a heap worse than the *Golden Horn*. However, I don't know that it'll make any difference to us, since we're not likely to have any dealings with them. Here comes our esteemed captain, looking as if he meant business."

"Back again, eh?" remarked Captain Coffin, as he paused for an instant beside them. "You're just in time, for

we'll warp out in fifteen minutes: If you'll step into the mess room, you'll find the steward somewhere about, and he'll show you your cabin. I didn't get your names when you first came aboard."

"Jack Bellamy and Dal Archer," Knowlton Darrell answered promptly. "I'm Archer."

The captain nodded, and, with the brief information that the steward's name was Sudo, and that he might need a kick or two to stir him up, he passed on.

"Sounds Japanese," Darrell remarked, as they sought the cabin.

"Humph! You don't think——"

"Oh, no. Nine vessels out of ten have Jap or chink stewards. Still, it behooves us to be doubly careful about giving ourselves away."

Sudo proved to be an inoffensive-looking little Jap with the sallow, impassive face of his kind. They found him arrayed in a fresh white jacket, and engaged in tidying up the already extremely neat mess cabin. As they appeared, he ducked his head and smiled.

"The honorable passengers desire cabin?" he inquired softly.

Without waiting for a reply, he stepped forward, and, taking their bags, led the way through a dark passage opening off the mess room, on either side of which were a number of small doors. He walked the entire length of it at the same mincing little trot, and then, setting down one bag, flung open the last door on the right.

The stateroom was small. It was also stuffy, the single porthole being screwed down tight. The Jap made haste to open this and hook it back.

As he did so, a big gray rat scuttled across the floor, and vanished into the corridor.

"Looks as if we might have undesirable company," Bellamy remarked, with a trace of annoyance in his voice.

"Oh, you'll always find plenty of those on a tramp," shrugged the secret-service agent. "It's one of the pleasures a fellow has to put up with sometimes."

They watched the Jap give a smoothing touch to the blankets on the lower berth, and straighten a pillow deftly. Then he pointed out the bell to summon him in case anything was wanted, and departed noiselessly, closing the door behind him.

"Not half bad for an old tub," commented Bellamy, dropping down on the berth.

"The stateroom, you mean?" Darrell smiled.

"Heavens, no! The Jap."

The secret-service agent shrugged his shoulders. "A mighty clever people," he remarked. "Whatever they set out to do they do well, even if it's only stewarding on a tramp steamer out of San Francisco."

Bellamy frowned. "Do you think there's any danger from him?" he asked, lowering his voice.

Darrell raised his eyebrows. "My dear fellow," he said, in a tone which barely reached his companion's ears, "there's always danger from one of these little brown men. With them their country is first and foremost. They subordinate everything to their patriotism. I don't mean to say that he's here purposely as a spy, but I know one thing: If he should have the slightest suspicion of our errand, he'd never rest until he had transmitted those suspicions to headquarters. It's up to us, therefore, to keep up our assumed characters when there's any possible chance of his being within hearing distance. After this the open deck will be about the safest place in which to discuss our real plans."

"I see," Bellamy nodded. "Well, let's get up there now. This packing box isn't exactly commodious, and it feels as if we were beginning to get under way."

The secret-service agent acquiesced, but before leaving the cabin he opened his bag, and took from the hidden compartment his copy of the government code book, which he placed carefully in an inner pocket of his coat. It was the only tangible bit of evidence he had brought with him which could betray his connection with the service, and he did not propose to run any chances.

The stateroom was the last of a row. A step or two brought them to a door leading out on the forward deck, which at the moment chanced to be almost deserted. Above them loomed the bridge, and in the glass-lined wheelhouse they caught a glimpse of Captain Coffin's square, rough-hewn face and massive shoulders as he guided the vessel skillfully among the many craft that filled the harbor, heading her around North Point straight for the Golden Gate.

The two friends had scarcely moved over to lean against the port rail when a man who had been squatting up in the bow straightened and turned slowly toward them. Bellamy saw him first, for Darrell was watching the moving panorama of city and harbor, and his muttered exclamation of horrified surprise brought the secret-service agent's gaze swiftly veering to the near foreground, and even he, with all his coolness and self-possession, felt a faint tremor of repulsion go through him.

The man was short and squat, with abnormally broad shoulders, and a decided stoop, which gave him almost the appearance of deformity. He had lost an arm, and the sleeve of his rough blue coat was doubled back and pinned in place. The other arm, hanging straight down, and a little forward from his body, terminated in a huge, hairy, muscular hand, with thick, square-tipped, stubby fingers.

So far there was nothing more than the grotesque in the appearance of the sailor; his dress and a certain hesitating roll in his gait seemed to proclaim

him a man who had returned to the sea after a somewhat prolonged period ashore. He gave one an impression of lopsided top-heaviness, as if the slightest jar would send him toppling forward; but that was a fleeting notion which was almost instantly swallowed up in the sinister fascination of his face.

It was round and baggy, with thick lips set in a perpetual leer. A stubby bristle of sandy beard grew well up on his cheeks, but not high enough to cover the livid white-edged scar which zigzagged down from the outer corner of the ghastly, puckered, empty socket looking as if the implement which had gouged away the eye had also torn open the whole side of his face.

But, horrible as it was, the gaping, wrinkled cavity paled into insignificance before the remaining eye. It was wide open and slightly protuberant, with an evil, baleful gleam in its depths; and from the moment of the man's turning it fixed the two friends with a steady, unwinking scrutiny which never altered until he had passed them and disappeared through the cabin door.

For a moment there was silence. Then Bellamy took a long breath, and laughed. "The old ruffian!" he exclaimed, glancing at Darrell. "Did you ever see a more villainous face in your life, Dal? It's enough to give a fellow the creeps. Where the mischief did he get chopped up that way, I wonder?"

"Give it up. He's a tough proposition, all right," Darrell returned. "It gets me how Coffin can stand for such a crowd. He seems like a pretty fair sort himself. I wonder if——"

He paused, and Bellamy regarded him curiously.

"Well?" the latter prompted, at length.

"Nothing special. I was just wondering whether there was anything queer about the vessel or her destination which would account for such a gang of cutthroats being aboard."

"Filibuster, you mean?"

"Possibly. Since the outbreak of trouble, it's become mighty dangerous and difficult to smuggle arms to the Mexicans, but I happen to know that the attempts have not stopped by a long shot. On the other hand, if there was anything like that in the wind the old man would certainly never have been so ready to take passengers. It looks to me as if we'd have to be on the lookout every minute for—some way of getting next to the colonel as soon as we land at Panama."

The changed ending of the sentence was due to the sudden and quite noiseless appearance of a strange young man in the cabin doorway. He was tall and slim and rather pale, with a little straw-colored mustache and lazy blue eyes which rested indolently on the two friends for a moment before he lifted his blond brows and moved slowly forward.

"This is really too good to be true," he observed. "It isn't possible that you are fellow passengers on this wretched vessel?"

Darrell's eyes traveled swiftly over the slender figure, clad in well-fitting blue serge, and came to rest on the bored face.

Then he smiled. "Strange as it may appear," he returned, "that happens to be the case. I trust the discovery is not unwelcome."

"Heavens, no!" It was scarcely an exclamation, so drawling was his tone. "Quite the contrary. I give you my word that I've rarely had a more pleasant surprise. When I was forced to take passage on this miserable tramp, her captain—an estimable man, but far from companionable, you'll admit—assured me that there would be but one other passenger. Having seen him, you can perhaps appreciate the pleasure with which I discover your presence here. My name is Philip Carmen, and I am more than glad to meet you."

"The feeling is reciprocated," Darrell returned pleasantly, as he shook the slim, languid hand. "I'm Dal Archer, and this is my friend, Jack Bellamy. We were both looking forward to a monotonous trip to Panama. Thanks, I will," he went on, as Carmen drew out a cigarette case and flicked it open.

Darrell took one of the thin Russian cigarettes, and, striking a match, held it for all three to light up. There was a scarcely perceptible pause as the secret-service agent filled his lungs with the pungent smoke and let it trickle slowly out of nose and mouth.

"I think you must be mistaken," he added, "in saying that we have seen this fourth passenger."

Carmen raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Surely you can't have missed him?" he asked. "I left him here on the fore deck not ten minutes ago. I give you my word once you set eyes on him you'll never forget his charming countenance as long as you live."

"Great Scott!" gasped Bellamy. "You don't mean that villainous, one-armed ruffian with only one eye?"

Carmen smiled, and nodded. "I thought I couldn't be mistaken. Genial old pirate, isn't he?"

"He looks as if he might be one of the greatest scoundrels unhung," Bellamy returned, with force. "We took him for one of the crew. Are you quite sure he's on board as a passenger?"

"Fact!" stated Carmen, with an airy wave of his cigarette. "Extraordinary, but true. He has a cabin next to mine. I couldn't quite credit his own statement, so I asked the captain."

"You've been talking to him, then?" Darrell put in quietly.

"Oh, yes. Once you recover from the first shock, there's something actually fascinating about him. He's so incredibly, repulsively hideous that one

finds an unhealthy sort of interest in just watching him. His name is Billy Boote—Roaring Billy Boote, to give him the whole of it, and I fancy if he chose he could tell tales which would make one's hair stand on end."

"But what's he doing on board?" Bellamy asked curiously. "Where's he bound?"

Carmen lazily twisted his blond mustache. "He proved reticent as to the reason for his presence here," he drawled. "The captain informed me that he had taken passage for Magdalena Bay."

CHAPTER IV.

TAKING THE BAIT.

THE words were followed by no actual pause. It was rather an impalpable sense of tension which affects one sometimes much as does an electric-shock vibration, and even that was made almost negligible by Darrell's presence of mind.

"Magdalena Bay!" he repeated, in very natural surprise. "I can't conceive what would take a man of that sort there. I've always understood it was one of the most desolate, God-forsaken spots on the Pacific coast. There isn't even a settlement, is there?"

Carmen selected another cigarette, and lit it on the glowing end of the first, his glance sweeping over the green Presidio, and coming to rest for a second on the ramparts of Fort Winfield Scott.

"Just a few greasers, I believe," he returned indifferently, swaying a little as the ship caught the swell of the open ocean. "I've given up trying to fathom the motives of other people. I travel a good bit, and in my youthful days I used to amuse myself by figuring out the whys and wherefores of various men I encountered. But being right about once out of ten times became altogether too much of a bore. Our

amiable but grotesque friend may have any one of a dozen perfectly good reasons for stopping off at Magdalena Bay, but I, for one, don't propose to waste gray matter on the subject."

Darrell shrugged his shoulders in casual agreement, and the subject was dropped for the time. Nevertheless, his interest in Billy Boote had been thoroughly aroused, and he made up his mind to lose no time in discreetly sounding that individual, to discover if possible the reason for his presence on board the *Golden Horn*.

This did not prove to be as simple as one might have supposed. In spite of the fact that he was a passenger, the man evidently preferred to mess with the crew. He did not appear in the cabin at dinner time, and afterward, when the three men took a turn or two about the deck, he was not to be seen.

It was not until late in the afternoon that Darrell, taking advantage of Carmen's absence in the cabin for some cigarettes, was able to slip away for a little tour of investigation. It was some time before he had any success. The fore deck was quite deserted, save for the lookout and a couple of black-browed sailors languidly scrubbing up. Making his way leisurely along, as if for no other purpose than to stretch his legs, the secret-service agent paused for an instant by the stokehole, through which came stentorian language, which showed that the engineer was having his own troubles with the stokers.

A little farther on he stopped abruptly in the shadow of the mast. From the direction of the fore-castle hatch rose a voice, raucous, rasping, yet with a strange undercurrent of melody in it which stirred the pulses unaccountably:

"Oh, we buried him deep in the deep, deep
sea,

Where the billows roll and the winds blow
free.

We cursed and we swore to hide our grief,
And a sail was the shroud of the pirate
chief."

Rumbled forth in deep-chested bass, there was something eerie in the wild deviltry of the chantey; something which gave Darrell the curious sensation of being transported a hundred years or more into the past, when ruthless pirates scourged the seas and rendered ocean travel perilous. He ventured to glance cautiously past the mast, and the illusion, instead of vanishing, was instantly made more real.

Sitting on the edge of the hatchway, his feet resting on the top step of the companionway, was Billy Boote. He had discarded the soiled linen boating hat he had worn that morning, and in its place had tied about his head a greasy red bandanna handkerchief, below which straggled a sandy lock or two of oily, tangled hair. He was smoking a very black pipe, with which he now and then gesticulated at the black-browed sailor whose head alone appeared above the hatch.

In a flash the puzzle of the slashed-off arm, the empty, wrinkled eye socket, the livid scar seemed to puzzle no longer. A vivid picture leaped into Darrell's mind of desperate hand-to-hand struggles where cutlasses flashed and bit, where red blood flowed, and wild oaths rang out amid swirling, choking clouds of smoke from ancient muzzle-loading cannon. It seemed incredible in these modern times.

"Them was the days, matie," Boote was saying, in a raucous growl, "when a man went to sea in a good old brig or schooner, an' was gone a year or more. Lots kin be done in a year, my boy, when you ain't troubled with no telegraph, or cussed contraptions like that. Ever hear on the Pearl Islands, off Panama? Owned by a lot o' greasers an' half-breeds, as usta send their finds back to the Isthmus in bulk. Some of 'em never got there." He laughed with a ghoulish sort of relish which rasped Darrell's nerves.

"Same with the gold from Peru, an'

bar silver shipped out o' Chile," he went on. "Now an' ag'in a ship left port as was never heard on no more. Some thinks she went down in a storm. Mebbe. She went down, anyhow, but not before her treasure room was stripped clean as a whistle. It ain't the times as is wrong, matie; it's the swabs as goes to sea. Look at the swipes aboard this ship." He lowered his voice, and the single eye glowed with an evil light. "Think o' what they could do if only they had a mind, an' you——"

He broke off abruptly, and glared fiercely at the secret-service agent, who had strolled carelessly into view, an unlighted cigarette in one hand. The sailor squirmed around, and stared upward, a sullen, half-frightened look in his shifty eyes.

Darrell's face was calm and undisturbed; his manner coolly nonchalant. "Either of you men got a match?" he asked pleasantly.

Boote's single eye gleamed balefully for a moment. Then, with a guttural growl, he thrust the black pipe roughly toward Darrell. The latter took it, lit his cigarette from the glowing ashes, and returned it with a word of thanks, which met with no response save another of those wordless snarls.

Undisturbed by this evidence of hostility, the secret-service agent made some casual remark about the ship, and for about five minutes exercised every wile and every bit of skill he possessed, which was not a little, to engage the villainous-looking character in casual conversation.

He failed utterly to extract more than a sullen monosyllable or two, delivered in a rasping voice, and at length was forced to give up the effort and stroll aft again, not a little chagrined at his lack of success.

"Either Carmen's lying when he says he talked with the old ruffian," he observed, "or else the genial Billy Boote

has taken a dislike to me personally. I wonder which?"

He continued to wonder every now and then as the *Golden Horn* steamed steadily southward, plowing her way through the long, heavy ocean swells. Sometimes the vague, hazy coast line could be seen dimly on the port side, more like a low-lying cloud bank than solid land. More often, however, the wide expanse of restless water was as unbroken as the glittering arch of deep, fathomless blue above their heads.

It was all so calm and peaceful that one felt instinctively that a mental relaxation should by every right accompany the physical restfulness. In spite of their appearance, the crew worked well enough. The food was plain, but well cooked and perfectly served by the silent, swift-footed Sudo. The trade wind, droning in measured cadence, tempered the heat of the glaring sun. The barometer showed no sign of falling. Carmen proved an interesting and amusing companion, possessed of an apparently inexhaustible fund of odd experiences which he related in his drawling, lazy manner with great effect.

In spite of all this, Darrell's mind was not really at ease for a single moment. First and foremost, there was constantly before him the thought of their journey's end and what they would find there. It lay upon his shoulders like an actual physical weight, which increased with every mile of water churned up by the ship's propeller blades. Had it been possible to plan ahead, the feeling of tension would have been infinitely less, but he was deprived of even this consolation. Their actions on arriving at Magdalena Bay would have to be governed solely and entirely by the conditions they found there.

The future was not the only thing which troubled him. He was impressed with a growing conviction that some one aboard ship was interested in Bellamy and himself to an extraordinary

degree. Whether it was that intuition which is something like a sixth sense, or the possession of an unusually acute hearing, by the end of the second day out he became certain that they were being constantly spied upon and watched.

When they turned in that night, Darrell proceeded at once to glance through his bag. He had left nothing in it which any one aboard ship might not have examined with perfect impunity, but he had a very decided curiosity to know whether or not it had been tampered with.

Almost at once he saw that a corner of the leather flap in the cleverly hidden secret compartment was crumpled a little, as if it had been hastily tucked back by a strange hand. The discovery brought a frown to his forehead, but he closed the bag without comment, and began to strip off his clothes.

Directly after breakfast next morning, Bellamy, appearing on deck, discovered his friend hunched over an old magazine, on which rested a sheet of stiff paper that looked as if it might have been torn from a dog-eared log book.

"What the mischief are you up to, Dal?" inquired the Californian, after a moment's puzzled scrutiny of the erratic lines and curves his friend was scrawling.

"Oh, just passing the time away," returned the secret-service agent, without glancing up. "A fellow's got to be amused somehow."

He continued his frivolous occupation for ten or fifteen minutes longer, and then, carelessly folding the paper, tucked it away in his pocket.

The matter passed completely from Bellamy's mind, and he was consequently amazed, as they sat together in the shadow of the deck house, two hours later, to have Darrell suddenly draw out the paper in a stealthy sort of way, glance suspiciously to right and

left, and then slowly unfold it on his knee, bracing to steady himself against the heavy roll of the steamer.

"Fifty paces south, southeast from the broken pillar of rock, it says," he said, in a low tone, pointing with one finger at a small cross in ink. "I'd give a lot, Jack, to know whether we're going to locate that or not. It bothers me a heap. What if it's fallen down and become buried with sand?"

For a second Bellamy stared at his friend in utter bewilderment. Then—for he was not particularly slow-witted—he realized that Darrell's extraordinary behavior was not the result of a whim, but of some definite purpose; and, as well as he was able, he took the cue.

"I don't see how a rock like that could fall," he answered slowly. "They'd never have taken it for a landmark if there was any chance of that."

Darrell's face took on a worried expression. "That's true enough, in a way," he returned; "but you must remember it all happened a thundering long time ago, and there's no telling what has——"

Suddenly he broke off, with a well-simulated start, and in a flash the paper was crumpled into a wad and concealed under his swiftly folded hands. Almost at the same instant, without the slightest preliminary warning, the soft-footed Sudo appeared around the corner, and paused before them, his round, childlike face wreathed in smiles, his bright eyes shifting from one to the other of the two men.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

THE honorable passengers, they like jamberry sauce with beef?" piped the Jap, in his treble voice. "I ask to know. Just now, tasking in galley, I find him large jug. I am beswitched to

know if he belong as sauce or better in pie."

"Er—make it into—er—pie, Sudo." Darrell hesitated, his hands closing tighter over the paper. "We like it—a—better that way, I reckon."

"I thank honorable gentleman with glad feel of heart," chirped Sudo, ducking his head again. "I go to inform miserable cook right smartly."

With another smile and bob, he pattered on along the deck, and presently disappeared in the direction of the galley. As the tail of his neat white jacket vanished, Bellamy turned swiftly on his friend, who was furtively restoring the crumpled paper to his pocket. "What the dickens——" he began.

"Merely a little experiment." Darrell smiled. "I grow more and more curious about our soft-footed friend every minute."

Bellamy stared. "Afraid I don't get you. What's Sudo's part in this little one-act drama you've just been starring in?"

Darrell chuckled. "I'd call it a problem play," he said, smiling. Then his face grew more serious. "It's just this, Jack: Somebody aboard has been spying on us: You know that. Well, that same industrious individual has also investigated my bag, and discovered the so-called secret compartment. There wasn't anything in it, but I'm naturally a trifle curious to find out who's showing such flattering interest in our affairs, and this fooling of mine is simply a stall to keep that interest warm."

"And you think it's Sudo?" ejaculated Bellamy. "Oh, come now, Dal! Why, he's nothing but a round-faced kid. You must be mistaken."

"Must I?" Darrell shrugged. "Take my word for it, Jack, he's not half so young or half so innocent as he seems. Besides, you mustn't forget that he's a Japanese."

Even then Bellamy was not more than half convinced. "I still don't see

how you've proved anything," he protested.

"I haven't," returned the secret-service agent. "That was only the first act. We will now proceed to set the stage for the second."

He arose, and, followed by the puzzled Californian, led the way to their cabin. When the door was closed, he drew the folded paper from his pocket, and smoothed it out.

"Of course, you understand that this is supposed to be an accurate copy of a treasure map," he remarked, in a half-jocular tone, which held in it an undercurrent of seriousness. "We must have a fairly plausible excuse for landing at Magdalena, and this is the best I've been able to dope out. There are countless rumors floating around of pirate hoards buried all along the desolate coast of Lower California—the estimable Billy Boote is responsible for that train of thought, I suppose—and I fancy we can carry out the part well enough for our purpose. That, however, is in the future. The map is in the nature of bait, and if I don't manage to catch the mouse, at least I may puzzle him 'right smartly,' as he puts it."

Lifting the bag, he opened it, and, pushing aside the contents, found the hidden compartment, and slipped the paper within. He had scarcely done so, when, without the slightest warning, the cabin door was suddenly thrust open, and Billy Boote, the blazing bandanna awry over one ear, stood on the threshold, seeming to fix both men and the bag with the baleful glare of his single eye.

For a second even Darrell was struck speechless by the audacity of the proceeding. It seemed impossible that the man who heretofore had shown so palpable a dislike for their society could have any other motive in appearing now save spying, and the secret-service agent's face darkened as he snapped the bag shut and dropped it to the floor.

"You've certainly got your nerve with you!" he said, staring at the fellow with narrowing eyes.

"No offense, mates," growled Boote; "no offense. I jest come to see if you had a drop o' rum handy, or any other spirruts. I'm sick, mates, very sick, an' that's a fact. The swab of a cap'n wouldn't gimme a drop o' grog—hang him!—an' there ain't another blessed thing as does me a mite o' good."

His tone was whining, and, as Darrell searched his face keenly, his own cleared a bit.

"By Jove, Boote," he exclaimed interestedly, "you're positively green! I'll be hanged if you don't look seasick!"

The one-eyed ruffian glared fiercely. "Seasick!" he rasped resentfully. "Me—seasick! Why, you common sw—er—matie, I sh'u'd say, do I look like a landlubber? Didn't I go to sea afore you was born? Ain't I doubled the Horn more times than you could count on your fingers an' toes? Typhoons, hurricanes, tornadoes don't mean no more to me than the little zepher as is blowin' this minute. Seasick? Bah! It's the rotten salt horse in the fo'castle, as ain't fit to dump in a pigsty. That's what's troublin' me inwards, an' if you got a drop o' somethin' strong to spare me——"

He wiped his mouth with an expressive gesture which brought a twinkle to Darrell's eyes and made him step over to the locker in which he had tucked away his pocket flask. The secret agent had pulled it half open when suddenly he caught sight of a gray shape streaking across the floor close to one wall, and like a flash he stooped and snatched up a shoe.

"Shut the door, Jack—quick!" he cried. "There's that blamed rat again. We'll get him this time, sure."

The slam of the door was drowned by a petrifying yell from Boote. With a single amazing leap, he cleared the space to the lower berth, clutched the

edge of the upper in his great, spreading fingers, and hauled himself up with a nimbleness astonishing in one so handicapped.

"Kill him!" he cried frantically, his teeth chattering. "Open the door, and let him out. Do somethin', why don't you? Don't let the devil get up here!"

Bellamy was so amazed at this extraordinary outburst that he allowed the rat to slip past him and take refuge under the berths, whereupon Boote fairly squealed with terror. A moment later, however, the rodent was driven into the open, and Darrell popped him over with a well-aimed blow from the shoe. Even then Boote refused to descend from his perch.

"Are you sure he's dead?" he quavered, peering over the edge of the berth, his ugly face white and drawn, and beads of sweat standing out on his low forehead.

"Of course he is." The secret-service agent picked up the creature by the tail, and tossed it out of the open port. "What are you scared about, anyhow? It's only a rat."

Still shaking nervously, the one-armed man crawled slowly down from his perch, and clutched the flask Darrell handed him. He poured out a drink, and a long gurgle followed, after which he seemed restored to some semblance of his usual self.

"Ah-h!" he growled. "That's the real article, that is." He glanced at Darrell, shaking his head solemnly. "Ye say *only* a rat, matie," he went on, in a reproachful tone. "If you'd seen what I've seen, such words would never pass your lips. Them devils are the only critters on land or sea that I'm scart of, an' with good reason. Twenty years or more ago a mate o' mine—Joe Blunt by name, a fine, upstanding lad as you ever clapped your ridin' lights on—fired his boot at a rat in the fo'castle o' the *Mary Jane* brig. He only stunned it, an' went an' picked it up.

2B

It bit him, mate, right here betwixt the thumb an' forefinger." He shuddered. "In half an hour his arm was swole up bigger'n his leg. In less'n that time more he was bloated all over, an' purple. I kin see him now. He died screamin'. Sharks I don't mind; snakes is nothin'; but from that day the sight of a rat curdles the blood in me veins."

In his agitation, he poured another long drink out of the flask, which almost emptied it, growled out his thanks huskily, and lurched from the cabin, casting furtive glances to right and left in the corridor.

"Pleasant story," commented Bellamy, with a slight shudder. "Do you s'pose it's true?"

"Sounds a bit fishy," shrugged the secret-service agent. "He tells it well, though, and I suppose it's within the bounds of possibility. Rats have carried the plague before, though an hour is a rather quick finish. I wonder whether it was really a desire for rum which brought him here, or something else."

"He looked sick, all right," Bellamy said doubtfully. "Do you believe he was faking?"

"Hard to tell," replied Darrell. "Well, having baited the trap, let's give the mouse a chance."

It lacked only a few minutes to dinner time, so they did not trouble to go on deck until the meal was over. As he arose from the table, Darrell produced an old magazine he had unearthed, and announced his intention of spending the afternoon in its perusal. Carmen languidly suggested that he read aloud, and the three trooped out on deck to settle themselves comfortably in the shade of the bridge.

Five minutes later the secret-service agent discovered that he had no handkerchief, and left the others for a moment to get one. Though the table was only partly cleared, there was no sign of Sudo in the mess room. Darrell

passed on to the corridor, and hurried straight for his cabin, making no sound in his rubber-soled shoes.

At the door he paused for an instant, fingers hovering over the knob. The next second he had thrust it open, and a faint breath of satisfaction passed his lips.

The little Jap stood near the port, the bag at his feet, in his hands the decoy treasure map.

CHAPTER VI.

AN EXCHANGE OF CONFIDENCES.

FOR a moment not a sound broke the tense stillness. Sudo's face was twisted over his shoulder, and his beady black eyes, fixed steadily on Darrell's angry countenance, were blinking with extraordinary rapidity.

"Come to make clean honorable gentleman's room," he said suddenly. "Find letter on floor. What do? I ask to know."

The secret-service agent sprang forward, and snatched the paper from his limp fingers. "It wasn't on the floor!" he exclaimed savagely. "It was in—er—put away. What do you mean by prying into my things?"

The Jap shrugged his shoulders regretfully. His expression was one of injured innocence. "But yes, honorable sir," he protested plaintively. "Here lay it beside of gripsack. I think only to make it safety."

The secret-service agent glowered fiercely for a moment. "Did you read it?" he demanded, at length.

His voice was a wonderfully artistic blending of anger and nervousness. Sudo's shoulders went up again, and he tilted his head a little to one side.

"Not surely, honorable one," he returned blandly. "Education pretty soon advance to read of English, but not yet, alas!"

Darrell stared for a second longer, and then burst into a laugh. "It

wouldn't really matter if you had, Sudo," he said, in palpably affected carelessness. "I was only fooling. This is trash—nothing important." He crumpled the paper, and thrust it casually into his pocket. "I thought I stuffed it into the bag, but I must have dropped it outside, instead. Go ahead and straighten up if you want to."

Clapping the smiling Jap reassuringly on the back, he found his handkerchief, and returned to the deck.

A little later, when he and Bellamy were alone, he took pleasure in informing his friend that the mouse had been caught.

"He took the bait, but whether he swallowed it or not I don't know," he concluded. "There's only one thing for us to do now, and that's keep our faces closed about our affairs unless we happen to be alone in the middle of the deck in broad daylight."

The astute little Sudo was not the only person aboard ship about whom Darrell was decidedly curious. Puzzling to begin with, the personality of Philip Carmen soon became something which absorbed a large proportion of the secret-service agent's thoughts. Watching him quietly and unobtrusively from day to day, the government official presently reached the conclusion that his lazy, languid, drawling pose was nothing more than a mask to hide the man's real self. What that real self might be even Darrell, with all his acuteness and ability at reading character, had so far failed to determine, for there was no question of Carmen's amazing cleverness.

To see him lying stretched out on a disreputable steamer chair he had unearthed from no one knew where, smoking innumerable cigarettes, or twisting the little blond mustache as he drawled out the details of some unusual experience, one would have set him down as a brainless fop. Yet, try as he might in every way short of downright

questioning, Darrell had been utterly unable to discover his occupation, his reason for traveling on such a vessel as the *Golden Horn*, or a single vital fact about him. This might, of course, have been due to an airy, inconsequential nature. There were one or two things, however, which made Darrell reject that theory.

After three days of quiet observation and study, he became aware of a vague, haunting sense of familiarity. It was not nearly so strong as a remembrance. His wonderful memory, cultivated by years in the service, made it impossible for him ever to forget a face, no matter how altered or disguised it might be. It was rather a curious feeling that Philip Carmen resembled some one of whom he had heard or been told. It even reached the point where he felt quite certain that the man was associated with some phase of his official position; but there his mind balked, stubbornly refusing to reveal anything further.

This nagging sense of familiarity reached a climax the night before they were due at Magdalena Bay. There was a low, thin moon that faintly crested the ocean swells with silver. The three men were sitting together, as usual, on deck, Carmen spread out on his steamer chair, smoking the inevitable cigarette. They had been discussing the Panama Canal—a safe, comfortable subject—but a short time before he had relapsed into a silence which remained unbroken.

Whether it was the choice of subject or not, Darrell did not know, but he was possessed of a tantalizing feeling that the man's identity was close behind the curtain of his own memory, ready to leap forth at a phrase, perhaps even at a single illuminating word.

It was maddening, this mental struggle for recollection, and he was straining every nerve to clutch and pin down the elusive memory, when all at once

he felt again that odd, intuitive thrill—that consciousness of being watched.

He did not stir or glance around, but a second later, as his eyes fell upon the winking end of Carmen's cigarette, he realized that this was the opportunity he had been wishing for all day. For an instant he hesitated, marshaling this thought. Then he bent toward the reclining one, chin resting in his cupped hands.

"Look here, Carmen," he said, in a low, impulsive tone; "I've been thinking things over, and I'm going to put you wise to something. Very likely you won't care a cuss, but I'll feel a lot better to have you know before any one else. Bellamy and I aren't going to Panama at all. We intend to be put off at Magdalena Bay to-morrow."

There was the barest perceptible pause during which the cigarette missed a wink, but Carmen did not shift his position by so much as a hair's breadth.

"Magdalena Bay?" he drawled. "You amaze me." One would never have gathered as much from his tone. "Would it be—a—indiscreet to ask why all this secrecy?"

There was the faintest touch of sarcasm in his voice, which did not escape Darrell. There was also the least hint of another emotion which quickened the secret-service agent's pulse.

"Not in the least," he returned quietly. "You see, we happen to be engaged in something which we were not at all anxious to have generally known, especially among such a crew as Captain Coffin has gathered together."

"Forgive me if I seem dull," Carmen said apologetically; "but I'm afraid I don't quite—er—get you."

"No doubt you've heard stories of treasure buried along this coast," Darrell said, his eyes fixed keenly on the shadowy figure in the steamer chair.

This time the pause was a little longer, and the cigarette glowed

brightly for several consecutive seconds.

"Treasure!" drawled Carmen, at length. "How very thrilling! And you have clews to something really valuable?"

"I think so. Of course, there's always a chance for exaggeration; but if it's what I believe, it should be almost priceless. You understand, I hope, why it was we kept our destination a secret? In a case like this, the fewer who know of it the better."

Carmen drew himself up in the chair, and flung one arm loosely back of his head. "Quite so," he returned. "Very true. I congratulate you, and wish you luck." He paused an instant, and then went on musingly: "So you'll go ashore with our genial bandit, Billy Boote? I wonder whether he'll prove any more communicative on dry land."

"So you're wise to the blocks I've had in that direction?" Darrell thought grimly. "I wonder how you found out?"

Aloud he remarked, in a tone of indifference: "I scarcely think so. What his business there may be I haven't the faintest idea, but we're not likely to see much of each——"

The sentence remained unfinished. From somewhere forward, high above the thud of waves against the sides, high above the rhythmical beat of the engine, sounded that harsh, familiar voice, roaring out the familiar lines, which, even in the repetition, seemed to lose nothing of their haunting, pulse-stirring devilry:

"We cursed and we swore to hide our grief,
And a sail was the shroud of the pirate chief."

Bellamy moved uneasily in his chair, and frowned. Coming just at this moment, the thing rasped his nerves.

"Roaring Billy seems to be living up to his name," Darrell remarked coolly.

"The charm of the unexpected," Carmen observed. His cigarette had

gone out, and, with an almost pettish motion, he cast it aside, and lit a fresh one.

"Archer," he went on, in the old-time lazy drawl, "your frankness has quite put me to shame. Here you've confided your plans to me, supposing that to-morrow we part, with little likelihood of ever seeing each other again. I suppose I'm a fool, but I've an idea that I can trust you both, so I'm going to tell you the truth. I've been sailing under false colors from the very beginning. Even the name I pass under isn't my own. I'm not bound for Panama, but Magdalena Bay."

Darrell felt his heart begin to beat faster. He bent forward a trifle, his eyes fixed on the shadowy face of the reclining man, his every sense tense and alert.

"Are you really in earnest?" he asked incredulously.

"Very much so," Carmen returned. "You see, I happen to be a secret-service agent, sent on here from Washington. My name is Knowlton Darrell!"

CHAPTER VII.

NO GUESSWORK ABOUT IT.

FOR a few seconds Darrell sat motionless. Then, swift as a flash of light, amazement was swallowed up in suspicion. Had Carmen known all along of his identity? Was this new move part of a deep-laid scheme to draw him out?

He stared through the shadows, trying to see whether Carmen was watching him with any special intentness, but the momentary glow of the cigarette showed the fellow's eyes half closed, his whole pose languidly relaxed.

A sudden roll of the ship sent Darrell's chair skidding out into the moonlight toward the rail. He recovered his balance and his mental grip on himself at the same instant. Whatever Carmen's motive had been in making

his extraordinary statement, there was only one thing left the secret-service agent. He must play the game with all the cunning that was in him; be ready to snatch at the slightest clews, and nail down the other's smallest slips. It was a game which fascinated him, and for which he had unusual aptitude. It would be surprising if he did not win.

"A secret-service agent!" he repeated, in astonishment. "But what on earth brings you to such a place as Magdalena Bay?"

His nerves were tingling now, and his whole being thrilled with the joy of mental combat. Moreover, he had suddenly realized that the plan he had started to put into execution a little while ago was succeeding better than he had ever dared to hope.

"Of course," he went on swiftly, as Carmen seemed to hesitate, "don't tell us if you feel you shouldn't."

The languid individual drew himself up a little in the long chair. "Naturally I shouldn't," he drawled. "I've already told you so much, however, that I may as well go on, and make a thorough job of it. I'm down here to investigate the information which has come to the department that the Japanese government intends getting a hold on the peninsula by establishing a coaling station at Magdalena Bay. I need hardly point out to you what that would mean to the United States."

"I don't suppose it would be a very good thing to have them so close." Darrell's tone was masterly in its suggestion of utter ignorance of the finer points of the affair. "Still, just a coaling station doesn't seem bad."

"But, my dear fellow, can't you see that it wouldn't stop there? Once they get their grip on this bay, which, by the bye, is one of the largest harbors in the world, they'd fortify it, equip it with immense stores of provisions, coal, arms, and ammunition; and in case of a war with this country, they'd have a

refuge from which their fleets could swoop down on the canal, or ravage the Pacific coast long before we could get warships anywhere near the scene. It would be a constant menace, and it's vitally important that it should be nipped in the bud."

"By Jove, yes!" Darrell agreed, with considerable force, as if seeing the enormity of the attempt for the first time. "But if they know all about it, why doesn't the government send word to the Japs to keep their hands off? What's the Monroe Doctrine for, anyhow—Darrell?"

"Please don't!" objected the languid young man quickly. "Keep on calling me Carmen, if you don't mind. My own name is a little too well known to be—er—quite safe just now. We don't actually know," he went on, in his usual tired drawl. "Only well-authenticated rumors have reached Washington, and it is to obtain the proofs that I am here. There have been one or two attempts like this before, but Mexico had always been discreet, and wary of offending the United States. Unfortunately the present trouble has brought about a great change in public opinion, and stirred up a bitter hatred throughout the whole country for everything gringo. The chief has almost certain information of an agreement between Carranza and Japan——"

He paused a moment to light a fresh cigarette from the glowing end of the old one. Darrell sat there, silent, suppressing any sign of the triumph which filled him. An instant before, the question which had been puzzling him for days had been answered. In a flash he had become sure—or almost sure—who Philip Carmen really was.

"—in which the latter," resumed Carmen, "promised to back Mexico in case the United States was forced to intervene to any greater extent in order to protect American citizens and their property. Japan would get Magdalena

Bay, of course, in return. That's the situation, and I can assure you that it's serious enough to keep some pretty big men in Washington sitting up nights. Beside it the clash with Mexico alone sinks into insignificance."

Darrell drew a long breath. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "I should say it was serious! Why, that means war with Japan and Mexico at once. How did you ever get wind of this, Carmen?"

"Through one of the force in Mexico," was the reply, after a momentary hesitation. "He's a chap of Spanish descent who's managed to get a position close to Carranza."

The secret-service agent was filled with amazement at the man's knowledge. He did not suppose that any one outside the service was aware of Frank Cabera's connection with the government.

"I see," he remarked, recovering himself swiftly. "Jove! Won't you have your hands full looking this thing up alone? Have the Japs landed there yet, or don't you know?"

"I fancy so," Carmen drawled; "though, of course, I can't be sure. It won't make much difference, however. I've laid my plans carefully, and I don't believe they'll have any suspicions."

Darrell would have given a good deal to know just what those plans were, but Carmen did not volunteer further information, and the secret-service agent could not very well ask a point-blank question. In fact, there was no opportunity for such an inquiry, had he chosen to make it. Carmen followed his last remark with a yawn, and arose, stretching.

"Well, I think I'll turn in," he went on. "This air makes a fellow sleepy. See you in the morning."

His slender, languid figure had scarcely disappeared in the direction of the cabin before Darrell bent forward and gripped Bellamy's knee warningly.

"Well, I reckon we might as well fol-

low his example," he remarked, rising to his feet. "I heard five bells a while back, and to-morrow is going to be a busy day."

There were no further words until they had reached the cabin and closed the door behind them. As the flame of the bracket lamp flared up, it shone on Bellamy's face, flushed and excited, in marked contrast to the mask of cool indifference presented by the secret-service agent. With a gesture of caution, the latter stepped over and closed the port. Then he dropped down on the lower berth, motioning his friend to sit beside him.

"Decidedly an interesting evening," Darrell remarked, in a tone which could scarcely have reached to the other side of the tiny cabin.

"Interesting!" Bellamy repeated, in a swift whisper. "That hardly expresses it, Dal. What the devil are we going to do?" His eyes ranged swiftly from his friend's clean-cut, virile face over the powerful, muscular figure. "You don't mean to let that chap cut you out, I hope?"

A faint smile curved Darrell's lips for an instant, and he raised his eyebrows whimsically.

"My dear fellow," he protested, "you don't mean to tell me you believed him? You don't imagine for an instant that he really is in the government employ?"

Bellamy's forehead was wrinkled in a puzzled fashion; his eyes were full of indecision. "But how else could he possibly have found out all he knows?" he protested. "I know he lied about his name; but for all that he might have done it as a precaution. You don't know all the men in the service, do you?"

"Not by a long shot. It happens, however, that I've got a pretty good idea as to who Mr. Philip Carmen really is, and can make a very fair stab as to where he obtained his information. I can assure you it wasn't through any

official channels. Look here, Jack," he went on, as his companion seemed still unconvinced, "just reason the thing out intelligently. If you were a secret-service agent, engaged on such a quest as he pretends to be, would you blab the fact to a couple of chance acquaintances?"

"Well, n-o," Bellamy returned slowly, "I don't suppose I would."

"Of course you wouldn't," Darrell went on briskly. "Not only would it be opposed to the very elemental principles of underground diplomacy, but there was absolutely nothing gained by doing such a thing. No; he lied about his occupation just as certainly as he lied about his name. That was a beautiful bull, wasn't it? I suppose he's heard of me, and thought the name would be the clinching touch of realism."

"But what in thunder did he fake up such a yarn for?"

"To hide the real reason for his presence here. You notice he said nothing until he found that we were also bound for Magdalena Bay. Then he had to concoct a story which would still any suspicions when he landed with us."

"What do you suppose that real reason is?" Bellamy asked. "Can he be connected with Ives in any way?"

Darrell shook his head slowly. "I hardly think so. There's a possibility of it, of course; but there's much more chance of his being in Carranza's confidence."

"Great Scott! You mean that part of his story is true?"

The secret-service agent shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. I only said there is a chance. Conditions in Mexico just now make it more than possible."

"That's true enough," Bellamy returned. "By the way, Dal, what was your object in giving him our treasure-hunting stall? You couldn't possibly have guessed what was coming?"

"Scarcely." Darrell smiled. "So far,

unfortunately, I haven't developed any marked mind-reading ability. It was simple enough. Sudo was hanging around again to-night, just as I hoped he would. I've been wanting a chance to foster that germ of doubt we planted in his mind yesterday, and this was it. When Carmen began his confidences, you can imagine how tickled I was."

"Jove, yes!" said Bellamy delightedly. "This will sick him after Carmen, and perhaps let us out a bit. Do you think he'll leave the ship with us to-morrow?"

"Haven't a doubt of it."

"But how——"

"Oh, he'll find a way." The secret-service agent shrugged. "Don't worry about that."

When they appeared at breakfast next morning, a hulking sailor, who seemed all hands and feet, was taking the place of the deft, silent little steward.

"Sick," growled Captain Coffin, in answer to an airy inquiry from Philip Carmen. "Took with a bellyache last night, an' says he can't get up."

His tone discouraged further questions, but after the meal was over Darrell followed him toward the bridge for the purpose of making a few discreet inquiries. The secret-service agent's manner was one to inspire confidence, and perhaps the captain was rather glad of a chance to unburden his mind.

"I don't know what ails him," he growled, in a harassed voice. "It ain't nothing serious, but he thinks he's going to die, an' wants to be put ashore. I done my best to brace the little rat up, but he's scart to death, an' won't listen to anything. Result is, he'll be landed at Magdalena Bay with the other two."

He sighed, and, taking off his cap, ran his fingers through his tousled hair.

"To tell the truth, Mr. Archer," he went on, in a lower tone, "I ain't altogether sorry. On the last voyage, my cook died o' yellow jack, an' while there ain't a particle o' danger—every-

thing was fumigated shipshape, you you—the whole crew deserted in San Francisco, an' I had to scrape up the lot of riffraff I got now. You can pretty well guess how they'll take on the minute they find Sudo's sick. They ain't above tossin' the beggar overboard some dark night, so I reckon it's as well to get him out o' the way before any harm's done."

Darrell agreed with him, and then proceeded casually to express his desire also to be set ashore that afternoon. The captain was surprised, but not displeased, when he found that no return of passage money was expected.

When Darrell rejoined his friend, there was a faint twinkle in his eyes. "Poor little Sudo is very ill, and wishes to die ashore," he said. "He lands with us at Magdalena Bay this afternoon."

"You guessed right." Bellamy nodded admiringly.

"No guesswork about it," declared Darrell. "It was a practical certainty."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT THE BREEZE REVEALED.

THE morning hours seemed to drag along on leaden wings. Darrell, Bellamy, and Carmen had moved their chairs to the port side of the fore deck, from which point of vantage they would get the first glimpse of the land which meant so much to all three of them.

Conversation was broken and spasmodic, for as the minutes slowly passed the feeling of tense expectancy increased until it was all Bellamy could do to hide the nervousness which was gripping him. Even the languid Carmen developed an unexpected capacity for restlessness, while Darrell, though outwardly unperturbed, lapsed now and then into spells of thoughtful silence.

Though the uselessness of it was quite obvious, the temptation to speculate on what awaited them at Magda-

lena Bay was irresistible. Would they find the Japanese in complete occupation, swarming over the place, and making it impossible to land even without the certainty of walking into a trap from which it would be impossible ever to emerge?

There was, of course, a possibility that the negotiations between Ives, who represented the owners of the land, and the Mexican government, which held sovereignty over it, had not yet been completed. There was also the barest sort of chance that the whole affair was in the nature of a false alarm; but to the secret-service agent this seemed very faint. Carmen's story, agreeing so closely with the stolen wireless, made Darrell almost certain that something big was in the wind.

He wished he had some means of knowing just how much of that story was true. It could scarcely have all been made up out of whole cloth, and if Carmen was the man he supposed him to be, he was certainly in a position to learn something of Carranza's intentions.

There was one phase of the situation which gave Darrell a grim satisfaction. If, as he had every reason to believe, it was Sudo who had spied upon them the night before, the suspicions of the Japs would almost surely be diverted to Philip Carmen for a time, at least, giving Bellamy and himself a brief respite from espionage. All the secret-service agent wanted was a breathing spell. A few hours, or even less, of freedom would be sufficient, he believed, for him to find out what he wanted to know.

Once that knowledge was his, provided he was able to lull suspicion until it was obtained, he could snap his fingers at the little brown men. There was no means of escaping from Magdalena by water, but forty-odd miles north of the settlement was the great rancho of Matancita, where an artesian well—the only fresh-water supply within a circuit

of a hundred miles—made a blooming oasis in the desert of burning sand.

Once there, it should be possible to find some means of crossing the peninsula to the east coast and making their way southward to La Paz, where was located a United States coaling station with wireless, which would bring them into touch with the outer world.

Dinner was a somewhat hurried and silent meal, and afterward the three men returned to the deck again. Two bells sounded, and three, and four, without so much as a low-lying cloud bank breaking the flat, distant horizon. It was after four, in fact, when a faint, vague haze appeared almost dead ahead, and another half hour elapsed before it was pronounced with any certainty to be land.

"I really think our goal is in sight at last," Carmen observed.

He had risen to his feet, and, with an expression which was far from bored, was studying the horizon with a powerful field glass.

"Yes," he went on, ten minutes later, "there seems to be no doubt about it. I recognize the cliffs of Man-of-war Island, which forms the outer edge of the bay."

Through his own glass Darrell had already assured himself of that fact some minutes before, but it was part of his plan to pretend total ignorance regarding the aspect of the place.

"I thought it was mostly sand," he said, in a tone of surprise.

"So it is, except for the rocky headland and islands and a high plateau to the north of the town."

Carmen did not lower the glass as he spoke, and for several minutes there was silence.

"I wonder if your Jap vessels are here," Bellamy said presently.

"I shan't know, of course, until we are in the bay. These cliffs make a most effectual barrier."

From that time on, the conversation

was fitful and broken. As the steamer plowed her way steadily through the waves, the glasses of the two men swept back and forth along the line of barren cliffs, which grew clearer and more distinct with every passing moment.

The place was as desolate as a desert waste. Not a touch of green showed anywhere. There was no sign of life or movement save thousands of sea birds circling and wheeling above the frothy waves which pounded and broke on the beach.

It was the essence of all that is lonely and deserted, yet Darrell knew that the rocky headlands between which their course was set might easily swarm with men and they be none the wiser.

As the *Golden Horn* neared the narrow gap between the two islands, the conversation ceased entirely. In the thrilling expectancy of the moment the secret-service agent dropped for a time his rôle of careless looker-on. Standing a little behind Carmen, so that the latter could not see his movements, he swept the precipitous headlands for a sign of life, but found nothing.

His practiced eye told him that the first act of an enemy, sure in possession, would be to erect batteries to command the entrance, which was barely five hundred yards in width; yet apparently the work had not been even started. Was it possible, he wondered, that the deal had not yet been consummated? A frown furrowed his forehead as he lowered the glass at length, and stood waiting for a view of the bay.

It came swiftly, and as the wide expanse of placid water spread out before him Darrell bit his lips to choke back an exclamation of overwhelming surprise.

To right and left a wonderful expanse of water glittered in the rays of the late-afternoon sun. In color it was almost as blue as the cloudless sky. The breeze had stirred it into little ripples, which lapped against the steamer's sides

with sleepy, soothing rhythm. Its surface was unbroken by vessels of any sort. Not even a native fishing boat could be seen. The whole atmosphere was as full of peace as if they had been entering a lagoon on some deserted island, and there was no thought of war in Mexico with the United States or any other power.

Incredulously Darrell swept his glass southward along the shores of the two islands which formed the lower boundary; northward along the cliffs of the long, narrow strip of land hemming in the bay in that direction; across the stretch of placid, deserted water to where he knew the little settlement lay.

At last he lowered it, and glanced swiftly at Carmen. "The Jap ships don't seem to have arrived," he remarked quietly.

"Apparently not." The languid person's voice was drawling, but Darrell fancied there was a faint undercurrent of relief in it. He wondered what brought it there. It looked very much as if the man was not particularly anxious to have his story verified. If that was the case, he could have no connection with Carranza, as the secret-service agent had feared.

"It is possible, of course," Carmen went on presently, "that they've landed the men and sailed away. I can't account for it in any other way."

That thought had occurred to Darrell, only to be rejected instantly. For them to send away the transports which had brought them there was too much like burning their bridges behind them, and would be an act of utter folly. Besides, there was Ives' yacht to be accounted for. It could scarcely have arrived more than twenty-four hours ahead of the *Golden Horn*, and that seemed altogether too short a time in which to conclude the transfer of title and all the other details which had to be attended to.

Could it be possible, he wondered,

that the whole affair had fizzled? It seemed incredible, yet when he remembered that their only clew had been a code message plucked out of the air his heart sank within him. That wireless might never have come from a yacht at sea. It was quite possible for it to have been sent from some apparatus in San Francisco. It might have been deliberately faked up by some sportive amateur. Heaven knew there were plenty such who possessed sufficient knowledge and skill to do it.

"I won't believe I'm mistaken till the proof is thrust down my throat," he thought, his jaw squaring doggedly. "We haven't landed yet."

The steamer was headed straight for a point of shore almost opposite the narrow entrance to the bay. Presently Bellamy went below for their belongings, and by the time he had returned Darrell was able to make out through his glass the spidery outlines of a wharf jutting out from the sandy beach. Soon afterward, he could see distinctly the low houses clustered back of the dock, and even the figures of men lounging in the shade of the buildings.

From their indolent attitudes he judged them Mexicans, and presently, when the glass had made his guess certain, he thrust it into his pocket and glanced at Bellamy.

"We may as well find out how we're going to land, Jack," he remarked. "I don't suppose they'll take the trouble of docking."

"Hardly," returned Bellamy. "We'll be put ashore in a boat, I fancy."

Picking up their bags, they walked aft, Carmen accompanying them. Here they found one of the boats being swung out on its davits. Billy Boote was on the spot, still wearing his red bandanna and carrying his dunnage wrapped in another. A moment or two later, Sudo appeared, looking pale and weak, and apparently scarcely able to stand. Darrell glanced at him curiously

for a moment, wondering what sort of dope the Jap had taken, for there seemed no doubt that the fellow was actually ill.

Slowing down to half speed a short distance from shore, the engine presently stopped, and then reversed. Captain Coffin himself was at the wheel, and it was evident he did not propose to waste time anchoring, for the boat was quickly lowered and manned, and the four passengers were hustled down the side into her.

Boote sat just behind Carmen, and as the boat lay for an instant rolling in the gentle swell while the sailors settled to their oars, he began hoarsely humming under his breath the haunting refrain of his pirate chantey.

"Shut up, for Heaven's sake, can't you!" snapped Carmen, with sudden unwonted heat. "I'm sick and tired of that confounded song!"

The one-eyed ruffian stopped abruptly and stared in an injured manner. "What's the matter with it, matie?" he inquired, with some petulance. "It's a good song as has been sung by many a good man now dead an'——"

He broke off suddenly; and Bellamy, who faced them, noticed, with a flash of startled comprehension, that Carmen had reached stealthily back and gripped the fellow's knee with warning fingers.

"By Jove!" he muttered under his breath, dropping his lids to hide the gleam of excited interest which had leaped into his eyes. "So that's the game, is it?"

CHAPTER IX.

POWERFUL CURRENTS.

AS they approached the wharf, Darrell watched intently the group of Mexicans who were moving slowly out upon it with an appearance of languid interest, as if the arrival of a steamer

was a matter of little moment. Surely they did not behave like men who had not set eyes on a strange face in months. This did not surprise the secret-service agent, however; past experience had taught him the nature of these indolent people.

On the wharf the Mexicans drew around them, offering to carry their bags, provide supper, a bed, transportation to wherever they were going, or anything else, in fact, which would bring in a few centavos. It was all the humdrum scene; yet Darrell had a curious feeling that it was overdone.

For a few seconds he stood as if undecided, his eyes taking in everything which went on about him. He saw Carmen pick out one of the natives and start off toward a house at the end of the row. He beheld the genial Billy Boote fiercely wave other greasers aside, and presently pursue his lurching way in the same general direction. Lastly he noticed that the little Jap had collapsed in a helpless heap at the end of the dock, as if too utterly exhausted to move another step. The fact that not one of the Mexicans so much as noticed him seemed more than significant to Darrell.

An instant later, Bellamy plucked his arm. "Carmen and Boote are together, Dal," he whispered swiftly. "They're friends. Did you see Carmen shut up the old pirate in the boat? And look at them now. I tell you they're here for one and the same purpose."

"Of course they are," returned Darrell. "Didn't you get wise to that before?"

Without waiting for a reply, he turned abruptly to the lingering crowd. "Who is the owner of that house?" he asked, in good Spanish, pointing to one which faced the wharf and seemed a trifle superior to the others.

"It is I, señor," spoke up a little man, bowing his way forward. "Will the

señores have supper, perhaps, and a bed?"

"Yes," said Darrell. "And let us have the supper, please, as soon as possible."

Taking up the two bags, the Mexican led the way down the wharf and into the building. The door opened directly into a small room which was a trifle more tidy than a pigsty, but Darrell was not thinking of dirt just then. With a swift, casual movement, he stepped toward a window and glanced out. The knot of natives was languidly dispersing, but Sudo was not among them. Neither was he crouching on the wharf, or anywhere in sight. In that brief space he had vanished as if the earth or sea had swallowed him, and the discovery brought a faint, enigmatic smile twisting the corners of Darrell's mouth.

"How long will it take you to get supper?" he asked abruptly, turning to the Mexican.

"But a little while, señor," the man replied. "A scant half hour, and all will be in readiness."

"Very well; make what speed you can. Meanwhile, my friend and I will stroll outside. We have been long aboard ship."

He was watching the man intently, and did not miss the flash of uneasiness which rose into the black eyes.

"The sun sets, señor," protested the Mexican, after a second's hesitation, "and the fever mists arise."

"We shall not be gone long enough to harm us," Darrell answered. "Be sure you have the meal ready within a half hour."

Without waiting for a reply, he stepped through the doorway, followed by Bellamy, and turned to the left along the fronts of the row of houses.

"Curious how the mists rise the minute the sun is down," he remarked casually, as they walked slowly on over the sand, trodden hard by the constant passing of the Mexicans.

Though the glowing sphere had barely dropped below the line of the islands, faint eddies and spirals of mist were already swirling shoreward in swiftly increasing volume, obscuring the flaunting splendor of blue and gold which tinged the western sky. Through the gathering mists they saw the *Golden Horn*, headed again for the open sea, and trailing a black smudge against the heavens. The sight engulfed them both with a sudden sense of loneliness that was almost sickening; a feeling of being deserted at the desolate ends of the earth; and, though neither spoke the thought, they wondered if the departing steamer was not bearing away their only hope of ever returning to the world from which they had marooned themselves by their own voluntary action.

They strolled on to the end of the row, and stood leaning against the frame wall of the last house, conversing idly and watching the odd effect of the swirling, thickening mist. A great cloud of it would roll up over the lapping surf, for all the world like some monstrous, bulging wave, only to be seized by a puff of wind and swept aside, or torn into ragged fragments, giving the two men a fleeting glimpse of the curving yellow beach beyond.

"Everything seems quiet along the Potomac," Bellamy remarked presently, in a low tone.

"Too quiet," returned Darrell crisply. "If only Ives' yacht were somewhere about the harbor, I might be inclined to think the whole business a false alarm. It's the total absence of anything suspicious that looks queer. Besides, where has Sudo gone?"

Bellamy had no answer to the question, and for a moment or two the secret-service agent stared thoughtfully at the fog. Suddenly his eyes brightened, and he pointed swiftly. The mist, which had been torn aside by the breeze, revealed two figures striding

briskly over the sand close to the water along the hard, sloping beach. One was tall and slim, the other squat, with a certain familiar grotesqueness of outline. That much they saw, and then the obliterating curtain fell again.

"By Jove!" Bellamy exclaimed. "There go——"

He stopped abruptly as the sound of a voice was borne faintly back to them out of the fog:

"Oh, we buried him deep in the deep——"

The last word was cut off with a suddenness which suggested a hand hastily clapped over the singer's mouth. A second later, before the Californian had time to speak, Darrell gripped him tightly by the arm.

"Look!" he whispered.

Again the cloud of mist was swept aside, and as they stared another figure—short and slim, almost as a boy's—slipped suddenly from behind a hummock of sand in the near foreground. For a second it crouched there, bent almost double. Then, without changing its position, it took to the beach, running swiftly, noiselessly, and in an instant had vanished.

"Sudo!" Bellamy said, in a tense undertone.

Darrell nodded, his forehead slightly puckered. The glimpse of that slim, wiry, resolute figure speeding through the mist in pursuit of the two men whose very presence in this desolate spot was a mystery stirred to new life the vague suspicions which had for a little while been quieted.

What it meant Darrell did not know. What he suspected was as vague and cloudy as the swirling mist about them. But as he turned slowly back toward the Mexican's house, he felt somehow that, calm and undisturbed as the surface appeared, deep down underneath subtle and powerful currents were at work which threatened to alter the destiny of nations.

CHAPTER X.

A FRESH SURPRISE.

A COMBINATION of unwelcome bedfellows, the close, stuffy atmosphere of the room which had been given up to them by the Mexican and his wife, and, most of all, an unsettled mental condition, resulted in a rather sleepless night for Darrell and Bellamy. They were astir early, and, after a fairly decent breakfast of fish and medricks' eggs, strolled forth and walked slowly northward along the curving beach.

The fog still lay over the country like a blanket. Already it was thinning, however, and in a short time it would vanish completely under the fierce, beating rays of the semitropical sun.

The two men were silent. Bellamy's face wore a dispirited, disappointed expression, for with every passing hour the conviction that the whole affair had utterly fizzled out became stronger and stronger. The absence of any Japanese, the empty harbor, the whole humdrum, sleepy atmosphere of the place, all seemed to prove that they had wasted their time on a wild-goose chase.

After starting out with such high expectations, the let-down was more than annoying, and, but for his friend's very evident preoccupation, Bellamy would have voiced his chagrin and disappointment the moment they were in the open. He hesitated, however, to interrupt the secret-service agent's train of thought, and so he slouched along in silence, hands thrust deep into trouser pockets, kicking petulantly at stray pebbles, waiting for Darrell to break the silence.

In this wise they traversed about half a mile of beach, when the secret-service agent stopped abruptly, and stood staring into the lightening mist, his preoccupied expression swiftly transformed into one of keen intentness. Bellamy paused, too, wondering what was up. The next second, he caught his breath,

and his eyes brightened as the chatter of voices, speaking in a foreign tongue, which sounded more than suspicious, came to him out of the fog.

"Japs?" he whispered eagerly.

Darrell nodded, and after an instant's hesitation began to move slowly forward. A dozen steps brought him to the beginning of a small promontory which broke the shore line. Bending over, he slipped behind a hummock of sand a short distance from the beach, and peered cautiously around it.

The mist had cleared sufficiently for him to see quite a stretch of beach, which curved inland, forming a shallow, sheltered cove. Scattered about on this beach were a dozen or fifteen little brown men engaged in spreading fish nets on the sand to dry. Bare of leg and back, they chattered and laughed as they went about their work without the slightest effort at secrecy or concealment. A little way up from the beach stood three or four rough huts. A fisherman's boat was drawn up on the sand, and, last of all, as the sun began to suck up the mist with increasing rapidity, the secret-service agent beheld the vague outlines of a small steamer such as the Japanese commonly use for deep-sea fishing.

Darrell was conscious of a swift wave of disappointment. Here were his Japs at last, but the discovery brought with it no sense of triumph. A handful of coolies, engaged in a perfectly legitimate occupation, was not what he had expected to find. For years the Japanese had fished in these waters, and there was no shadow of significance in their presence here.

Frowning, he arose to his feet and started to rejoin Bellamy. He had not taken two steps when his eyes widened with a fresh surprise. Anchored a quarter of a mile offshore, almost opposite to the dock, lay a beautiful steam yacht, her immaculate white paint gleaming in the sunlight which had just

broken through the scattered, flying fragments of fog. A moment later, the silvery chime of her bells striking seven came to him over the water.

"There's Ives!" Bellamy said excitedly. "When do you s'pose he got in?"

"Give it up," returned Darrell.

Bellamy stared in surprise at his friend's frowning face. "What did you find?" he asked swiftly. "Weren't they Japs?"

"Sure! A dozen or more fishermen spreading their nets to dry. Look as if they'd been here for months. Let's go back."

As they retraced their steps, they saw a tender put out from the yacht and head toward the dock. By the time they reached the settlement, it had made fast, and a tall, fine-looking man of forty-odd years, dressed in spotless white duck, was striding briskly over the rough planking.

Darrell had never happened to see Harrington Ives, but he felt certain this was he. There was a suggestion of mental power in the man's carriage and in his square, resolute face which brought a sparkle to the secret-service agent's eyes, and swept his lassitude away in an instant. The old keen interest in playing the game gripped him again. The capitalist's reason for being here might be perfectly legitimate, or, again, it might not. Darrell meant to do his best to find out.

"Let me do the talking at first, Jack," he said softly. "We may have to shift our story."

Ives had paused at the end of the wharf, and was watching them approach with frank and open curiosity.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed heartily, as they came up. "This is a surprise. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you strolling along the beach just now. You must have got in last night. What sort of a trip was it overland? That sounds nosey, doesn't it?" he said, laughing, before Darrell had time to

speak; "but it isn't meant that way. You see, visitors of any sort are mighty scarce around these parts, and then they're mostly not real white men. That's why I'm curious. My name is Ives, by the way—Harrington Ives."

"Mine is Archer," explained Darrell readily, "and my friend is Jack Bellamy. I don't blame you for being surprised at seeing us here," he went on, in a dry tone. "We're surprised ourselves. If any one had told me twenty-four hours ago that I'd be promenading the beach at Magdalena Bay this morning, I'd have called him a liar."

Ives raised his eyebrows. "Yes?" he said interestedly. "You mean you got here sooner than you expected?"

"Not at all. We didn't expect to come. Last Saturday we left San Francisco on a tramp, bound for Panama, but when one of the crew came down yesterday morning with cholera, we decided to get ashore at the earliest possible minute."

"Cholera!" Ives exclaimed. "By Jove! I don't blame you for beating it. That's about the last thing I'd care about being cooped up with aboard ship. Sure it was cholera?"

"Dead sure, though the captain was a close-mouthed beggar, and it was just luck we found out before there was much chance for exposure."

"You must have landed while we were up the coast getting water," Ives said. "Well, now you're here, what do you think of the place?"

"It's the most God-forsaken hole I was ever in," returned Darrell promptly and with much force. "I've seen some rum places, but this has them all beat in the show-down. Why, there isn't a white man here; nothing but greasers and a few Japs, and they have to tote every drop of water forty miles. If I'd had any idea how bad it was, I'll be hanged if I wouldn't have taken a chance on the tramp!"

Ives laughed. "Lay on, Macduff!"

he exclaimed. "I happen to be the president of a syndicate owning most of the land hereabouts."

The secret-service agent grinned. "That so? I'm sorry for you. Looks to me as if it might be a gold brick, unless there are minerals here, which doesn't seem likely. I wish you'd given a little more attention to traffic arrangements. I understand we've got to wait anywhere from a week to a month for a steamer to put in, or else hoof it over two hundred miles of desert."

The older man chuckled. "You're certainly in a bad fix," he agreed. "Luckily I'll be getting out of here myself in a day or so, and can take you along. In the meantime, just to remove the sour taste from your mouths, I'm going to take you aboard and give you a good American luncheon, with trimmings. You see"—his eyes twinkled—"I feel as if I should do all I can to prevent you from knocking the property ever after this."

"That's mighty good of you, Mr. Ives," Darrell said gratefully, "but haven't you any feeling about—"

"The cholera?" put in the older man swiftly. "Not a bit. You say you weren't exposed; that's enough for me. Life's too short to waste time fretting over the unlikely. I'll be with you as soon as I've given some instructions to this agent of mine."

CHAPTER XI.

A BIT OF A SLIP.

THE two friends watched Ives walk briskly to the very house in which they had spent the night, and enter without knocking.

Bellamy edged closer to the secret-service agent. "Is he bluffing, Dal?" he asked, in a low tone.

"I'm not sure, but I think so," was the answer.

"Yet you mean to accept his invitation and go aboard the yacht?"

"Certainly."

"But it will be putting ourselves completely in his power," protested Bellamy. "What's to prevent his keeping us there indefinitely if he chooses?"

"Nothing," returned Darrell quietly. "We've got to take the chance, that's all, Jack. It's simply playing the game. So far, I've found out nothing; there's scarcely been time. Aboard the yacht, he may let something slip, and I want to be there to catch it. Besides, when you get down to facts, we're about as much in his power on shore as anywhere else. There isn't a greaser here who wouldn't obey— Here he comes. Remember your part now, and don't mention Carmen, Boote, or Sudo unless he asks a direct question."

"Well, that's over," Ives said genially, as he rejoined them. "Now we'll go aboard. You were half right when you called the proposition here a gold brick," he went on, after they were settled in the trim launch. "It's a big, wonderful stretch of territory, but without water it is next to useless. When we bought it, we supposed, of course, it would be an easy matter to sink artesian wells at various points, but we were mistaken. Personally I haven't given up hope. The well at Matancita, forty miles north, was discovered only a few years ago, and my engineers may strike something yet. Until that happens, however, it's all we can do to pay taxes."

"I see." Darrell nodded. "I should think it would be hard to do even that." To himself he was saying: "Why is he telling us all this? What's his point in giving details of this sort to a couple of perfect strangers? Is he trying to blind us, or has he some other reason I haven't caught on to yet?"

"It is hard," Ives returned. "Of course, the orchilla crop brings us in the largest income, but even such trivial things as gathering abalone shells and

leasing these fishing rights to the Japanese help out."

A little flicker of satisfaction leaped into Darrell's eyes, and was gone. So that was it! Ives evidently felt it necessary to explain the reason for the Japs being here. A man with nothing to hide would not have cared whether his guests understood or not.

"What is orchilla?" Darrell asked curiously, as the launch swerved in to the gangway and was deftly caught by a waiting sailor with a boat hook.

"A moss used in making dyes," Ives explained, following his two guests to the deck. "It grows on the mesquite and cactus hereabouts."

He led the way aft, where, under an awning, comfortable cushioned chairs were scattered about. The moment they were settled, he summoned the steward and ordered wine.

"It's the one thing that's cheap and fairly good in this country," he said, smiling, as Darrell expostulated. "I never touch the water myself in a place like this."

Darrell made no further objection, and, when the wine appeared, he proceeded to drink some with a coolness which excited Bellamy's admiration. The Californian was possessed with the conviction that every minute of their stay on the yacht was fraught with some unknown danger, and the instant wine was mentioned his mind leaped to the conclusion that it would be drugged.

This notion presently passed away, however, when he saw that Ives was not sparing the bottle, and he became slightly more composed. A little later, his roving eye fell upon a heavy piece of planking fastened upright in the extreme stern, on which was tacked a paper target.

"By Jove, Dal!" he exclaimed, pointing in that direction. "There's something that ought to interest you."

"You shoot?" Ives asked, glancing at the secret-service agent.

"Shoot!" exclaimed Bellamy impulsively. "I should say he does! I don't believe he could miss a bull's-eye if he tried. And shooting isn't his only——"

"Spare my blushes, Jack," Darrell interrupted. "Pretty soon you'll be giving me a reputation I'll find difficult to live up to."

His voice was drawlingly good-natured, but there was a faint something beneath the surface which made his friend realize that perhaps he had been a little indiscreet.

"Well, well!" commented Ives interestedly. "It's funny, but pistol shooting is my one and only hobby, and I've always flattered myself I was pretty fair at it. What make do you use?"

"Oh, almost any reputable one," returned Darrell, laughing.

Ives arose swiftly, his eyes sparkling. "That's great!" he exclaimed. "I've got as nice a line of firearms aboard as you'd want to see. I'll bring a couple of them up, and we'll have a little match right here and now. I don't doubt your friend's word," he went on, smiling, "but I'm from Missouri."

As he disappeared into the deck house, Bellamy glanced swiftly toward his friend. "Sorry, Dal," he whispered. "I won't slip up like that again. Is this part of his game, do you think?"

"Give it up," replied the secret-service agent. "I don't know what he's after, unless it's to find out our accomplishments. Fortunately the ability to shoot doesn't prove anything against a man."

CHAPTER XII.

A NAMELESS FEAR.

IF Harrington Ives' object was to discover Darrell's proficiency as a marksman, he certainly succeeded. At such close quarters, target practice was naturally not much of a test, but even there the host's record fell slightly behind that of his guest. When a sailor began tossing up empty bottles for them

to fire at, however, the difference was much more apparent. The best Ives could do was to shatter two of them before they struck the water, while Darrell, firing as swiftly as he could pull the trigger, emptied the chamber of his revolver, and each bullet found its mark.

"You ought to be in a wild-West show," Ives said at length, in a tone of mock petulance. "You could give the cowboys cards and spades." He tossed his revolver on a wicker table, and dropped down in a chair. "I've learned my lesson," he went on, his eyes twinkling. "It's a dangerous thing to brag about one's accomplishments to a stranger."

He took his defeat in good part, swiftly turning the conversation to other things. For an hour they chatted casually on all sorts of subjects, and in spite of their peculiar situation, both men could not help being interested in their host. He was a person of affairs, a polished man of the world, who had had many unusual and interesting experiences, and told them well.

At luncheon he played the genial host to such perfection that it seemed impossible there could be any ulterior motive governing his behavior. Afterward he took them all over the yacht, even into the perfectly appointed wireless room, the operator of which, it seemed, combined with his easy duties those of second officer. That done, they settled down under the stern awning with another bottle of wine.

During all this time, though Darrell had been constantly on the watch, he had failed utterly to notice anything questionable in the man's behavior. To every outward seeming, Ives was bent on giving two marooned men a good time—nothing more. But for two or three little slips, noticed earlier in the day, Darrell's slight suspicions would long ago have been quieted. As it was, the remembrance of these kept him

keyed up, hoping for something more definite to work upon. It came at last, but not until he had almost begun to despair.

"Desolate? Yes, I should say so," Ives was saying, in answer to a remark of Bellamy's. "But there was a time, my boy, when there was something doing along this coast. Pirates," he added, as the Californian raised his eyebrows. "This used to be a favorite gathering place for them in the old days. Surely you've heard tales of treasure buried hereabouts?"

He glanced suddenly at the secret-service agent, but, though his pulse had quickened, Darrell's face was perfectly composed.

"They say that of every lonely bit of beach," he returned. "Buried treasure and the sea-serpent myth are stock assets of all the seashore hotel keepers on the coast."

"But this is something more than rumor," persisted the older man, his eyes fixed keenly on Darrell's. "A lot of gold and jewels has actually been unearthed within a few miles of this very spot, according to the Mexicans."

"Really?" remarked Darrell, in a tone of faint skepticism. "I wish to goodness I could hit on some sudden, easy source of wealth like that. I'm afraid if I did, though, the shock would be fatal. I wonder what it would feel like to spade up a cache of gold and diamonds as one does potatoes?"

Ives' smile was just a trifle forced. "Exciting would hardly express it," he returned, glancing at his watch. "By Jove, it's later than I thought! I'm sorry to say I've got to go ashore for a bit. You boys hang around, though, if you like, and have dinner with me."

"You're very kind," Darrell said, as he stood up. "But I guess we won't overdo it. If you really mean to help us away from this blooming place, you don't want to get sick of the sight of us before you weigh anchor."

"Not much danger of that," Ives said pleasantly. "But suit yourselves."

Ten minutes later, at the end of the pier, they parted with an interchange of cordial good nights. Ives remained to give some instructions to the second officer, who had come ashore with them, while Darrell and Bellamy passed on to the house facing the wharf, found that supper would be ready in half an hour, and went into their room.

Bellamy was the last to enter. He closed the door and stood back against it, his eyes fixed on his companion's suddenly relaxed face.

"Well?" he questioned.

"There's something up," Darrell said swiftly. "I'm sure of it now." His face was alert and eager, his eyes bright. "He took us on board to sound us, but instead he gave himself away three or four times. He's seen Sudo!"

"What!"

"No doubt about it." The secret-service agent spoke in a rapid whisper. "Sudo has put him wise to what happened on the *Golden Horn*. That's why he brought up the subject of buried treasure so pointedly. He wanted to find out for himself, if he could, whether there was anything in it. Moreover, he knew there was no cholera aboard. If he'd had the slightest doubt of it, do you suppose for an instant he'd have asked us to lunch? Of course not! Lastly he made no single, solitary mention of Carmen and Boote. He must have learned from the greasers, at least, that they landed yesterday. Wouldn't it have been the natural thing to ask us about them? Instead, he says nothing, because he doesn't want us speculating as to what has become of them. And now, Jack, what *has* become of them?"

Bellamy shook his head bewilderedly. "You've got me. I haven't the least idea."

"Nor I; but I mean to find out." Darrell crossed swiftly to the window.

It opened at the back of the house, and looked out on a wide, desolate waste of rolling sand, over which the first faint spirals of mist were slowly gathering.

With a quick, beckoning motion of his hand, he slipped through, and dropped noiselessly to the ground. Bellamy followed without hesitation, his mind in a state of fresh disturbance. A moment before, everything had seemed quiet and peaceful. In that brief space nothing had actually happened, yet now he found himself suddenly possessed of a vivid sense of peril. Where it lay, from whence it would come, he had no real conception; but the sense of it welled up strong within him, the more gripping for its very vagueness.

Heading straight inland, Darrell swiftly reached a friendly sand dune, and they slipped behind it. Looking back, the secret-service agent could see no signs of their departure having been observed. He bent low, Bellamy following his example, and they dodged to another hummock, thence to a third, and finally, when the line of houses had disappeared, Darrell whirled straight to the south and started circling back to the beach at a rapid walk.

"They've been gone over twenty-four hours," Darrell went on suddenly, exactly as if he had left off only an instant before. "The place is a desert, and they can't have taken much food and water. To the southward there isn't a settlement in two hundred miles. Inland, the nearest one is fully half that. Where have they been keeping themselves all day? That's what I want to know. And I have an idea, Jack, that the answer to that question means a lot more than it seems."

Reaching the beach, they were able to make much more rapid progress on the firm, hard sand. There was scarcely any breeze, and the mist was coming in so slowly that they could still see a fair distance ahead. Half a mile farther on, the shore line curved inward in a wide,

deep cove, and in the middle of the crescent, raised there by one of those odd freaks of nature, was a jutting, rocky plateau rising raggedly from the smooth sweep of yellow sand.

The sight of it made Darrell stop suddenly and stare for a second. Then he glanced swiftly back along the curving ribbon of a beach. It was very still, very desolate, and quite empty, save for the swirling mist moving slowly in uncanny shapes.

With a quick, decisive gesture, the secret-service agent started on again, headed for the nearest side of the rocky plateau, with Bellamy close at his heels. In three minutes they had reached the base and begun to climb over the scattered boulders and debris. It was not difficult work, for the summit could have been little more than forty feet above the beach, and they were soon at the top, squirming their way forward between the rough, jagged rocks.

Darrell was ahead, and all at once he stopped with an abruptness which startled Bellamy. For a second he lay absolutely still. Then, without turning his head, he motioned the Californian to squeeze in beside him.

Filled with curiosity, the latter lost not an instant in wriggling forward into an opening between two boulders, and there he lay, heart thumping and eyes wide with amazement at the scene spread out before him.

The plateau was fairly large, with the surface of the central part sunk slightly below the edge. A number of white tents were pitched there in regular rows, which suggested the military in their neat precision. The place fairly swarmed with Japanese. It was impossible to guess accurately their number, but there must have been several hundred of them.

Some were squatting over charcoal braziers, apparently cooking supper. Others gathered in groups, talking together in low tones. Still others were

passing in and out of the tents. There was not a uniform to be seen, but from the first Bellamy felt absolutely sure that they were soldiers.

He was still staring dazedly at the animated scene when he felt Darrell plucking his arm. "We've seen enough," the secret-service agent whispered, as they crept back among the rocks. "You understand what it means, of course? They're waiting for something before they take possession. Very likely Carranza is holding off for further developments in the conflict. At least we've discovered what we wanted—and more."

"And Carmen?" Bellamy questioned, as they slid cautiously downward over the rocks.

"They've gobbled him up, of course. He must have walked right into them. We can't stop to bother with him now. We're going to have about all we can do getting out of here ourselves with whole skins."

"But if we can reach the settlement without their finding out we've been here——"

"That particular 'if' is a mighty big word just now," Darrell said grimly. "We're not there yet, by a long shot."

They made the remainder of the descent in silence. The mist was thickening rapidly, and by the time they reached the bottom it was hardly possible to see a dozen feet ahead.

Turning toward the beach, they took a swift step or two before Darrell stopped short and gripped his companion by the arm.

"Listen!" he whispered. "Did you hear——"

The sentence was never finished. Out of the fog—out of the very ground, it seemed—a dozen shapes leaped into sight. In front, behind, on either side, they darted up in that one breathless instant and flung themselves at the two men. Darrell had barely time to throw up his clenched fists, Bellamy to whirl

so that his shoulder pressed against the tense muscles of the secret-service agent's back before the ring of men closed in upon them.

CHAPTER XIII.

LEFT WITHOUT HOPE.

DARRELL'S right shot out and reached the point of a shadowy chin with a crack which lifted the Jap off his feet and sent him whirling backward out of the circle. Almost with the same movement, it seemed, he planted his left between a pair of blinking eyes, and another man plowed a furrow in the sand with his head and shoulders. This brought no respite; instantly the gaps were filled, and the circle closed in.

A slight, muscular figure flung itself forward like a diver taking the surf, and Darrell felt two arms gripping his right leg tenaciously, while eager hands clutched him on every side. A fierce kick ended in the crunch of leather against flesh. There was a gasping grunt, and the clinging hold relaxed. The secret-service agent grasped a wrist, and, with a practiced twist, a heave of his splendid shoulder muscles and taut biceps, he sent another little man spinning through the air to land a dozen feet away with a dull, bone-cracking thud.

Still those who were left persisted doggedly in the effort to overpower him, and the almost utter silence with which they fought was awesome. There were no shouts or yells or shrill cries. The silence was broken only by the thud of pounding feet, the hissing intake of swift-drawn breaths, the smothered gasps which followed a blow striking home.

A fierce, joyous lust of battle was throbbing in Darrell's veins, gleaming in his eyes, and adding strength to every well-directed blow. His knuckles were raw and bleeding, his face and neck were torn by clutching hands, his breath

began to come in uneven gasps; but the smarting pain and weariness were swallowed up in the savage thrill of combat.

Suddenly from behind Bellamy's panting changed to a stifled gasp of dismay, and Darrell knew intuitively that his friend was being dragged down. A swift, heavy body blow sent the sole remaining Jap who faced the secret-service agent toppling back into the mist, and, whirling, he saw Bellamy prone on the ground, struggling desperately against the weight and clutching hold of four wiry brown men.

Two of these instantly relinquished the fallen man and sprang up to face the government agent. As they leaped forward, Darrell met them halfway, and for the fraction of a second the three seemed closed in an indistinguishable embrace. Then, one after another, the Japs, beaten at their own favorite jujutsu, whirled through the air, struck the sand heavily, rolled over for a turn or two, and lay temporarily stunned.

The two remaining assailants, seeing that they had no chance, started to run, but they were too late. Bellamy had the presence of mind to grip one by the ankle, while Darrell caught the other by the neck, and in an instant both were hors de combat.

Even now there was no time to pause for breath. From the plateau had come the sound of shouts, and a clatter of rolling stones told Darrell that a fresh squad of Japanese were swarming to the scene. With a swift, swooping motion, he caught Bellamy under the arms and dragged him to his feet. Supporting the dazed and panting Californian, he whirled toward the beach at a staggering run.

"Don't bother—with me, Jack," Bellamy gasped presently. "I'm—all—in."

"Only winded, aren't you?"

"Yes; but—you'd better——"

"Shut up, and save your breath!"

Bellamy relapsed into silence, because of something in his friend's voice which

dominated him. The mist was very thick, and they ran blindly, sometimes on hard sand, sometimes splashing through the frothy, lapping water they could not even see. Gradually the Californian got his second wind, and, with the dragging handicap of his weight removed from Darrell's shoulders, they made slightly better speed. Behind them the sounds of pursuit seemed to increase with every stride they took.

"Where——" gasped Bellamy at last.

"The yacht," panted his companion. "It's a slim chance, but—the only one. The wireless. If I can only get in touch—with La Paz—put them wise and——"

They stumbled on. Presently they realized, with an odd sort of shock, that they were passing the row of houses which formed the little settlement. Only the vaguest outlines showed through the mist, with here and there the dim, diffused glow of a lighted window. As they padded silently along the beach, they heard the drawling murmur of voices, punctuated by the intermittent tinkle of a mandolin. Evidently their absence, which must have been discovered by this time, was causing the Mexicans no uneasiness. Doubtless they had known from the beginning, Darrell thought grimly, that the two gringos would not be allowed to go far.

"How are we going to get aboard?" Bellamy asked, as they felt the planking of the dock under their feet, and hurried out upon it.

"Swim, if we can find no other way," Darrell answered crisply. "It's too much to hope for——"

He stopped abruptly, his eyes lighting with a swift gleam of surprised delight as they fell upon a painter half hitched around one of the piles. A second later, he was looking down through the mist into the empty launch that bobbed gently against the wharf.

Ives and the second officer—the wireless man—were still ashore. The two

sailors had probably grown tired of waiting in the damp mist, and gone to find what diversion they could in one of the near-by Mexican houses. Luck seemed playing into Darrell's hands.

"Cast off, Jack—quick!" he whispered, swinging himself down into the boat. "This is almost too good to be true."

Like a flash he switched on the juice and turned the engine over, and the sharp pop-pop that broke the silence was sweet music to his ears. Bellamy hastily tore the painter loose, flung it aboard, and scrambled after it. An instant later, Darrell jammed forward the control lever, dragging hard on the tiller rope, and the launch swept out from the dock in a wide, graceful circle, and slid away into the mist just as a babel of excited talk came from the direction of the settlement.

"You look after the engine," directed Darrell, springing forward to the wheel. "The Japs have struck the settlement, and things will boil in half a jiffy."

Having the location of the yacht well in mind, there was no time lost in circling around to find her. In a scant three minutes her lights began to shine through the fog on the starboard side, and Darrell promptly threw the wheel over, bringing the launch deftly to the foot of the gangway, where a sailor stood waiting.

The man's jaw dropped when he saw the occupants of the tender, but Darrell gave him no time to ask questions.

"Had a little mix-up with the greasers," he explained crisply, "and we had to take the launch and come on board. Mr. Ives wants one of the men to bring her back at once, though. Can you run her?"

"Why—er—yes, sir," the fellow faltered.

Followed close by Bellamy, the secret-service agent sprang up on the gangway and pushed the gaping sailor toward the tender.

"Hustle, then!" he said swiftly. "He won't want to be kept waiting. If he's not on the dock, make fast and wait. Better leave the engine running. Understand?"

Stirred by Darrell's crisp hint of peril, the man dropped into the launch, leaped to the engine, and in a moment the tender shot away into the fog.

Darrell and Bellamy did not pause to see it fade. They slid into the shadow of the bridge just as the figure of the captain appeared by the rail. A moment later the two men crept through the door of the darkened wireless room, closing it behind them.

"You do the sending," snapped Darrell, as he switched on the light.

Bringing out his code book, he flicked over the pages with steady fingers. Bellamy flung himself into the chair and hurriedly adjusted the double receiver. His hand shot forward to a switch. There was a click as the starting lever crossed the contact points, a glaring flash of green light, which lit up the tiny room, and in an instant the place resounded with the familiar crescendo drone as the current from the engine room was thrown into the dynamo beneath the table.

Tersely Darrell gave the call for the government station at La Paz, and the key beneath Bellamy's pliant fingers began to snap and snarl. At the mast-head above them the spark crackled and spat.

"Keep calling," Darrell urged. "Keep it up a minute or two without stopping. Add the distress signal—anything to raise them."

The operator's vibrant fingers kept the key clicking continuously. Over and over he repeated the call, adding the ominous "S. O. S." signal which stirs the blood and sets thudding the heart of every wireless man. Urgently, insistently the vibrating appeal flashed out over wastes of desert and ocean alike.

"La Paz! La Paz! La Paz!" it begged. "Answer! Answer! Hurry—hurry—hurry!"

Darrell, his face tense and drawn, little beads of perspiration dotting his forehead under the tumbled hair, stared desperately at the silent receiving apparatus. Much more than his own safety depended on that bit of mechanism leaping into responsive life.

"They must answer," he muttered, through clenched teeth. "They must!"

Suddenly he whirled around, leaped across the room, and turned the key. A second later a hand gripped the knob and rattled it violently.

"Is that you, Horton?" inquired a voice.

It was the captain! Silently Darrell slipped back to the table and motioned Bellamy to cease for an instant.

"It's me. What's up?" mumbled the secret-service agent, in a marvelous imitation of the second officer's harsh tones.

"What are you locked in for?" the man outside asked suspiciously. "Where's Mr. Ives?"

"Ashore. I've come aboard to get off a message, and it's mighty important."

There was an inarticulate growl, audible even above the renewed crackling at the masthead, a momentary pause, and then the sound of retreating footsteps.

Darrell gave a faint sigh of relief. "Keep on calling, Jack," he urged. "We've got to raise them."

As the compelling entreaty for recognition began again to clamor, Darrell stood listening for a moment, and then tiptoed softly to the door. For a second he stood there, rigid. Then, cautiously turning the key, he drew the door slowly toward him.

From across the water came a sound which turned his set face a shade less brown. It was the barking of the launch engine, growing rapidly louder and

more distinct. In a few minutes Ives would be on board—Ives, who now knew everything, and against whose fury a locked door would be no barrier at all.

"Don't they answer?" he called back over his shoulder, his voice quivering a little under the tension which was gripping him. "Haven't you got a thing?"

"Not a word!" was the despairing reply. "I can't understand it. The fellow should be——"

"Call! Call! Keep calling. Don't stop for a second." Darrell's voice was dogged. "We've got to raise them, I tell you! We've got to let them know what's going on here."

His heart was like lead within him. Outside, the sputter of the launch engine had given place to a turmoil of excited voices, amid which the angry bel-low of Ives rose loud and clear.

"In the wireless room!" it roared. "You fool! Break in the door! Stop him at any cost!"

The rush of many hurrying feet was broken by a cry from Bellamy. "I've got Saltus!" he shouted. "I've got him at last! What shall I——"

Darrell slammed the door and turned the key. Through his mind flashed the promise made to him one time by the secretary of the navy that if ever he needed his help, even to the sending of a warship, it would be given at his request. In another instant Darrell was standing behind the operator's chair, automatic leveled at the white-and-gold panels of the frail door.

"Tell him the Japs are here in possession," he snapped. "Tell him to relay this instantly to Washington."

Bellamy managed to get off that much of the message. Then the crack of a pistol shot sounded high above the drone of the dynamo and the other noises of the wireless room. It was followed by a sharp exclamation of wonder from Bellamy, as he pounded the sending key frantically.

"It's dead!" he cried. "I can't get any response. Something has happened."

Already Darrell knew. The sudden cessation of the spitting crackle at the masthead told him beyond a doubt that the wire above had been severed, and that they were checkmated so far as getting any response was concerned. He dropped both hands to his sides in a gesture of despair, and for a second he stood there heedless of the clamor of harsh voices without, and the crash of something heavy against the door. Then, with a slight shrug of his shoulders, he slid the automatic into his pocket and glanced down at his friend's pale, upturned face.

"Nothing doing, old man," he said quietly. "We're blocked. We can only hope that they got——"

As Bellamy ripped off the encumbering receivers and sprang to his feet, Darrell crossed the room, a smile on his face. "No need to make them spoil a perfectly good door," he said.

He turned the key, and, flinging the door open, stood calmly facing the group of sailors, amid whom stood Harrington Ives, his face coldly furious, in his hand a pistol. As the door opened, he raised the weapon to cover Darrell.

"Horton," he snapped, "disarm them!"

The second officer stepped warily forward, but the secret-service agent forestalled him. Knowing the utter futility of resistance, he produced his automatic and handed it over politely.

"The fortunes of war," he remarked, taking out a tobacco sack and papers.

"Bah!" grated Ives harshly. "Search him thoroughly; he may have other weapons. Now the other one," he went on, as Darrell submitted to the operation with an air of bored weariness. "Nothing more? Good! Tie their hands behind their backs—tight, now."

The secret-service agent touched a match to the end of the neatly rolled

tube of tobacco and took a deep inhalation.

"Is that quite necessary?" he drawled.

Ives turned on him and stared for an instant out of eyes which were hard as flint and utterly implacable. Of the genial good-fellowship he had shown that morning there remained not a single trace.

"I find it so," he said, in a grating tone. "I think, my versatile friend, you'll find, before many hours have passed, that I'm not the sort of man it's healthy to play tricks on."

With no further words, and with not the faintest change of expression, he waited till the operation of binding the two prisoners was complete. Then he stepped to the rail.

"All right, Takaro," he called. "Your men are ready."

A sudden shiver flickered along Darrell's spine. A moment later, as they were being led toward the gangway, he caught a brief glimpse of the launch filled with silent, waiting brown men. Their upturned faces were as expressionless as so many masks, but Darrell knew that beneath the surface lay no touch of pity or mercy or even justice. Theirs was the most hopeless sort of cruelty—the impassive cruelty of a patriotism which let no human emotion interfere with the accomplishment of a purpose that would benefit their country.

It was to such as these that Harrington Ives, a man of birth and breeding, was surrendering them without a qualm!

It was monstrous, and for a single instant Darrell's lips parted for indignant protest. Immediately, however, he realized the utter futility of it, and closed them again. It would be a useless humiliation. Better to play the game to the finish in silence.

Reaching the gangway, he paused for an instant and spat out the cigarette. His glance sought out Ives, and

there was an expression in his eyes which sent the older man's lids fluttering and brought a touch of color to his cheeks.

"Good night, Mr. Ives," he said. "It's odd, but do you know I have a fancy I'd rather be in our place than yours." An instant later he was descending quietly to the waiting launch.

CHAPTER XIV.

TRYING A LITTLE BLUFF.

THERE was small chance for conversation between the two friends had there been anything to say. Reaching the dock, the Japs closed about them in a body and hurried them southward along the beach, evidently heading for the camp on the rocky plateau.

On arriving there, they were led to a tent that was completely surrounded by armed guards. Here Takaro tightened their bonds, added others about their ankles so that they could barely hobble, and thrust them unceremoniously through the loose, canvas flap.

As he took in the interior with one swift glance, Darrell gave a low exclamation of surprise. The place was quite bare of furniture, and was lighted by a single lantern swinging from one of the poles. Stretched out on the bare rock, their arms extended at full length above their heads, and held there by taut ropes such as were also fastened to their feet, were two men: Philip Carmen and Roaring Billy Boote.

The latter was far from living up to his name and self-imposed reputation. He lay as if in a stupor. His face was drawn and haggard; the color of his skin was a mottled gray. Now and again he rolled his head from side to side and gave a low moan. His whole appearance was, in fact, that of a man half dead with terror.

Carmen's eyes were wide open, and at the entrance of the newcomers he raised his head with a painful effort,

disclosing a face which held in it no trace of the languid, lazy expression it had worn aboard ship.

"You, too!" he muttered, with an effort at nonchalance which was not altogether a success. "Well, there's some slight comfort in having company, I suppose."

"There generally is," commented Darrell, with a smile. "So you found your Japs, after all."

Carmen scowled. "Found them! They found us! Look here, Archer," he went on, after a brief pause, "we're in a mighty tight place, and there's no sense in trying to keep up that bluff. I'm no more a secret-service agent than you are. I'm down here with that scum"—he jerked his head toward the moaning Boote—"after a lot of pearls he got track of, buried here forty years or more ago by some pirates. When I ran into you aboard ship, I thought you were stalking us, and gave you that song and dance about being a secret-service agent to throw you off the track. It was the biggest bull I ever made, for that rotten little Sudo must have heard us talking, and now his Jap friends won't believe a word I say, in spite of their finding the map and everything on me."

"Too bad," remarked Darrell. "It must be annoying to slip up at the very last moment. The pearls would have been easier money than helping the Mexican conspirators."

There was a gasp of startled amazement from Carmen, and for a moment he lay staring dazedly up at Darrell.

"You know?" he muttered at length. "You knew all the time?"

"Quite so. You see, I happen to be a very good friend of the real Knowlton Darrell."

Carmen's face showed the intense chagrin which filled his soul. "Fool! Blockhead!" he muttered. Then a puzzled look leaped into his eyes. "But this Darrell never saw me," he ex-

claimed. "He busted up the scheme, I admit, and nabbed some of the boys just as we were ready to cross the border, but so far as I know he never set eyes on me."

"He had a fairly accurate description of you," Darrell explained, "which, I am bound to say, fits you rather better now than it did on the steamer. By the way," he went on, with a faint touch of curiosity in his voice, "if you had any idea the Japs would be here, why under the sun did you take this time for coming?"

"Because I was a jackass, I suppose," returned Carmen bitterly. "I heard about it from a pal of mine in Mexico City two weeks ago; but it was only a rumor, and I didn't believe it for a minute. Look here, Archer. Won't you help me out? Won't you tell this head Jap devil just what I am, and what I'm here for? It won't hurt you, and it may do me a lot of good."

His tone was pleading, and the secret-service agent, after an instant's hesitation, shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, yes, I'll tell him, if I get the chance," he agreed; "but I don't believe it will do much good. Whether you came for that purpose or not, you've discovered them here in possession. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, they don't mean to run any risk of that knowledge traveling very far from Magdalena Bay. Our genial pirate doesn't seem quite up to the mark," he went on, as Boote gave a groan which shook his whole frame. "Is he sick or anything?"

Carmen's face darkened, and his eyes flashed scornfully. "Pirate—him?" he sneered. "The chicken-livered dub never saw the sea before except with his feet planted safely on dry land."

"What!" gasped Bellamy incredulously. "But his lingo—that gory song—the whole look of him!"

"All faked up," snorted Boote's partner. "He worked in a sailor's joint on the Barbary Coast for years. That's

where he got his sea talk, and also where he just happened on the information about the pearls. He never set foot on a ship in his life till he came aboard the *Golden Horn*. Why, he was sick—actually seasick!"

His tone was one of ineffable scorn. Bellamy glanced curiously at the grotesque figure, with its closed eye and pallid, frightened face.

"He lost an arm setting off fireworks at a kids' picnic years ago," went on Carmen jeeringly. "His eye was gouged out on a picket fence he was trying to climb over to escape a ferocious dog. Look at him—petrified with fear! He hasn't the courage of a mouse, hang him! And he's to blame for getting me into this hole, with that detestable song he learned from some *real* pirate, and persisted in——"

He stopped abruptly as the tent flap was pushed aside, and two Japs entered. A nervous tremor seized him, but was stilled as one of the intruders—Takaro—beckoned to Darrell. "You come!" he said peremptorily.

As the secret-service agent hobbled toward the entrance, he turned his head and looked at Bellamy. Not a word was spoken; there was only a swift, instantaneous exchange of glances. And yet the Californian seemed to read in his friend's eyes regret and farewell.

"It can't be as bad as that," Bellamy said to himself, when Darrell had disappeared. "And, even if it is, he needn't blame himself for my being here. That's up to me."

Outside the tent, a squad of waiting men closed around Darrell with a swift cautiousness which brought a whimsical smile to his lips.

"Very flattering," he said to himself, "especially when I'm trussed up like a fowl. They evidently don't believe in taking chances."

He was conducted to a large tent, standing a little apart from the others, at the farther end of the row. The

guard at the entrance fell back. Takaro took the secret-service agent's arm and drew him swiftly into the lighted interior.

Darrell's first impression was of a certain ominous stillness, which was the more significant from the fact that five or six men were present. One sat at a table in the center of the tent, while the others stood behind him, their figures sharp and distinct against the white canvas. Among the latter was Sudo; and as his sweeping glance came to rest for a second on the bland, child-like face of the little Jap, the prisoner caught a faint gleam of triumph in the beady eyes.

There was no recognition in Darrell's, however, nor the least hint of surprise. With an impassiveness quite equal to that of his captors his gaze returned to the man at the table. The latter was plainly of much higher class than any of the other Japs. His hands were small and shapely yet strong; his forehead was wide, his glance keenly intelligent; his whole manner was that of a man accustomed to command. His expression was so cold, indomitable, and ruthless that the secret-service agent's heart sank within him.

"Well, sir," the Jap said suddenly, in English which held only the faintest trace of accent, "have you anything to say in your defense?"

Darrell raised his eyebrows. "How can I, until I know of what I am accused?" he returned quietly.

The Jap's face remained absolutely impassive. "You are Knowlton Darrell, a United States secret-service agent," he stated positively. "You are here in the capacity of a spy. Is there any reason why you should not be treated as such?"

Staggered as he was by the other's knowledge, Darrell managed to retain his coolness.

"Under conditions of actual war-

fare," he returned, "a spy is usually hanged or shot."

"Precisely," was the brief response.

Darrell lifted his eyebrows a trifle. "Whatever may be said as to Mexico, I have yet to learn that such conditions exist between my country and yours."

"Conditions are sometimes what we make them," stated the Jap succinctly. "Having the power, and realizing the necessity, it happens that I choose to act as if a state of war existed."

"And so, perhaps, merely anticipate a little," Darrell remarked.

Inwardly he was not nearly so indifferent as he seemed. Swiftly, almost feverishly, he was shuffling over the few pitiful cards which remained in his hand. There were no trumps left. His opponent held them all. And yet, supposing it was a game of poker he was sitting in?

"I think," he went on swiftly, "if you are seeking to bring about an open rupture between our countries, you could not find a better way."

The keen black eyes narrowed the barest trifle. "I do not quite understand," the Jap said briefly.

"A United States cruiser, probably the *Chicago*, is due here some time tomorrow morning," the secret-service agent said quietly. "I was wondering how you would explain my disappearance to her commander. You see, it was arranged in Washington that he should come up from Panama to meet me here."

The shot went home. A ripple of more than uneasiness quivered across the erstwhile impassive face of the Jap, and his skin seemed to turn a shade more sallow. For a second or two he sat staring fixedly at Darrell, as if trying to plumb his very soul.

"That is impossible," he said suddenly. "The *Chicago* is with the squadron which left the Isthmus four days ago for the Philippines."

"She was with that squadron," cor-

rected Darrell gently. "Since then her destination has been changed."

For a moment longer the Japanese stared intently at the captive, standing there with such apparent coolness and indifference. Then he turned and spoke rapidly in his native tongue to one of the men behind him, who answered briefly. There followed some terse directions to the waiting Takaro, and finally the Jap glanced again at Darrell.

"I believe you are lying," he said sternly, "but time will swiftly tell. We shall wait and see what to-morrow brings forth."

Darrell bowed coolly. "You are—wise."

He was not conducted back to the tent where the others were confined; instead, he was taken to another tent and promptly staked out on the ground, as Carmen had been. For a time he lay there, staring up at the lantern and listening to the murmur of the guards stationed all about him.

At first he was rather pleased at the success of his bluff, based solely upon the message that Bellamy had succeeded in getting off from Ives' yacht; but presently he began to wonder whether, after all, it was worth while. The Jap had been quite right in saying that the *Chicago* was one of the squadron scheduled to leave Panama for the Philippines four days earlier. Probably by this time she was plowing steadily through the Pacific, hundreds of miles away.

The morning would pass without incident. The afternoon would be equally devoid of happenings. By nightfall the Japs would realize that they had been fooled. And then!

What would surely follow was not pleasant to contemplate, and it kept Darrell awake for hours, in spite of his physical weariness. At length, however, he fell into a troubled sleep, from which, despite the increasing discom-

fort of his fixed position, he did not awake until long past daylight.

The morning dragged on leaden wings. He ached in every part of his body. Through a slit in the canvas he could see the shadow cast by the tent and make a rough guess as to the time. About eight o'clock Takaro brought him a bowl of rice and some tepid water, loosening his arms so that he could sit up to eat and drink, which was a blessed relief.

With no chance to resist, he was compelled to submit as gracefully as possible to being bound as before, and Takaro departed. Toward noon there was a rustle of the flap, and Sudo slid softly in and stood looking down on the helpless man with that same irritating gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"Honorable sir's ship delay," he remarked, a faint touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"Oh, she'll come, all right," Darrell answered carelessly. "Likely she stopped to coal at La Paz."

"Should come speedy," returned the Jap, with unmistakable significance, "else maybe not find honorable secret man."

"In that case," Darrell remarked, apparently unmoved, "I'd hate to be in your shoes. There won't be many whole Japs left when the commander gets through."

Sudo wriggled his shoulders a little and lifted the tent flap. "I ask it," he chirped skeptically. He slipped through, and an instant later thrust his head back. "Honorable gentleman's map for treasure great thing," he said, grinning.

"The little devil!" muttered Darrell, when he was left alone. "He saw through it all along. I'd like to wring his yellow neck!"

More than once during that interminable afternoon he wished he had let things take their natural course. Yet he had the vehement dislike of every sane, healthy man to being assisted into

eternity. He had found life too interesting and full of savor to care about relinquishing it just yet. His profession, however, had accustomed him to risks and chances, to peril and danger unknown to the ordinary man. It had bred in him a realization that the end might come at the most unlikely time or place, and made him ready to face it with unflinching courage.

To meet it swiftly, with head high and a smile on his lips, was one thing; to lie here, helpless, suffering a hundred dull or darting pains, counting the crawling minutes which seemed like hours, tortured by vain regrets and might-have-beens, was quite another.

To begin with, he had failed utterly in his purpose, but that had been through no fault of his, and somehow it did not trouble him nearly so much as the thought of Bellamy—the friend for whose presence here he was responsible. That haunted him ceaselessly. He meant, of course, to make a last desperate appeal in the Californian's behalf, but he had a conviction that it would be futile. Knowing quite as much as he himself, Bellamy was dangerous to the Japs' plans, and they were not likely to spare him.

And then at intervals another horror lifted the curtain of his memory and peered forth like some gruesome specter gibbering from a shadowy place. Years before, in Nagasaki, he had seen a criminal strangled, and the ghastly horror of it stayed with him for many weeks. It returned now with dreadful clearness, and, though he kept thrusting it back with every bit of will power which was in him, it was never really very far away.

The sun sank lower and lower, and finally disappeared. As the fog began to roll in, damp and clammy, Darrell shivered a little with the cold. No one had come near him all the afternoon, save one of the guards, to bring another bowl of water. Apparently they did

not think it worth while to waste more rice upon him. A crooked smile twisted his lips at this realization, and he sighed deeply. He did not want the food, but he would almost have given anything for the solace of tobacco.

It looked as if they meant to come that night, and for a long time he lay waiting with tense nerves and ears strained for the slightest sound which would signal their approach. Swiftly the shadows deepened, yet nothing happened. They had brought no lantern, and at last the darkness began to press on his senses like a smothering pall.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN THE SHOW-DOWN CAME.

SUDDENLY out of the black void of darkness there rang a cry—high, shrill, and full of horror, yet strangled in its birth with a ghastly suddenness which turned Darrell's blood cold. With a hoarse exclamation of fury, he tried desperately to rise, but the ropes held him fast. For a moment or two he struggled fiercely to tear his hands loose, but succeeded only in bruising and lacerating his wrists. At last he sank back with a long, sobbing sigh, and lay there, eyes closed and chest heaving.

Slowly the long hours of darkness dragged on. More and more clearly to the helpless man's tortured senses loomed up that ghastly scene in Nagasaki, each tiny detail clear, distinct, and vivid. He saw again the high-backed teakwood chair, pierced with its rows of holes, like a huge cribbage board. He saw the gaunt, impassive executioner slip the ends of a twisted silken cord deftly through two of these holes and draw them back until the loop lay loosely across the throat of the man sitting strained and upright on this throne of death.

But in the picture etched with such dreadful distinctness upon his seething

brain the face of the man in the chair was not that of the degenerate criminal he had seen; it was that of Jack Bellamy, his friend.

The first pale streaks of dawn, sifting into the tent, fell upon a face in which the lines of mental and physical pain had been replaced by dogged inflexibility of purpose. Darrell had determined that his captors should have no satisfaction from him. He would play the game to the bitter end, striving to implant in the mind of their leader a carking, nagging doubt as to whether, after all, there might not be some truth in his story.

Thus it happened that when this same leader appeared in the tent, a little later, a field glass in one hand and his eyes gleaming with suppressed anger, he found the secret-service agent as cool and nonchalant as he had been some thirty-six hours before.

"Your warship has not appeared," stated the Jap icily.

"No?" drawled Darrell. "Then it will surely show up to-day."

"I differ with you," was the curt retort. "It will never come. From the first I suspected you were bluffing; I am sure now. Takaro!"

The other Jap was at his side in an instant. A swift interchange of terse sentences passed between the two, followed quickly by the entrance of a dozen more little brown men. As Takaro slit the ropes and pulled Darrell to his feet, the death guard closed round him and swept him out into the clear sunlight, his arms bound at his sides.

The central part of the plateau was bare, save for a single object, which stood out clear and distinct from the half circle of silent men. To the untutored mind it looked like an ordinary chair, hastily improvised, perhaps, and of somewhat odd design. But Darrell's mind was not untutored. He knew, and after that first swift, appraising glance, he did not look that way again.

Instead, his eyes swept coolly around the waiting circle, coming to rest the next instant on a familiar figure, the sight of which sent the blood ebbing from his cheeks, only to flow back in another second, a flaming wave of crimson.

It was Jack Bellamy, his face a little pale, but his shoulders squared, his head high, and his eyes unflinching. On one side stood Carmen; on the other, supported by two imperturbable Japs, was the flaccid, lurching, half-conscious Boote.

For the fraction of a second Darrell's self-control was almost shattered. Jack was still alive! It was some other voice which had been ringing in his ears all night—perhaps Boote's raised in a delirium of terror. Darrell's hands were clenched tightly, his teeth were set in his lower lip. An instant later, his face was again calm and impassive.

Reaching the edge of the cleared space, the guard halted at a word from Takaro, and, pushing through his men, the Japanese leader paused before Darrell.

"Have you anything to say?" he asked curtly. "Are you ready to admit, now, that your warship is a myth?"

Darrell looked him squarely in the eyes. "I admit nothing," he replied grimly, a certain threatening undercurrent in his voice. "But I tell you that before many hours have passed you will be regretting bitterly the thing you are about to do. One moment!" he went on, as the Jap turned away with an impatient shrug. "These other men have nothing to do with the United States secret service. You can hold them prisoners for any length of time, but at least there is no necessity—"

"They must take their turn," rasped the Jap harshly.

His eyes were hard and pitiless, and as Darrell stared for a second into them he realized that his effort had been in vain.

"As you will," he returned quietly.

The guard closed about him again, and moved out into the cleared space. Darrell's face was calm and fearless, his quiet self-possession perfect. On his lips was a faint, bored smile, as if he were performing a necessary but rather tiresome duty. He did not glance at Bellamy; he could not.

When they reached the chair, two men advanced to place him in it, but he took his seat unaided. And, though every muscle was tensed with horror at the touch of the thing, not a tremor showed in his impassive face.

A man stepped forward and thrust the cord through the hole with deft fingers. The silky thing slid loosely across the secret-service agent's throat, feeling to his raw, quivering nerves like the touch of a snake. For a second it dangled there, and then began slowly to tighten. Darrell's eyes were fixed on the smooth water of the bay, rippling in the morning sun. In another moment the whole picture would vanish.

Suddenly a distant shout clashed upon Darrell's senses, like a crashing peal of thunder, followed swiftly by another. There was the sound of stones rattling down a slope. Some one snapped out a sharp order, and the crawling motion of the cord ceased, leaving Darrell dazed and wondering.

An instant later, he was conscious of a vague, uneasy movement in the circle of waiting men. Presently he heard the padding of feet; swift, staccato sentences jerked out in a breathless voice; then a sudden uproar all around him.

What had happened? What could have happened? He ventured to lean forward against the horrid cord, and found there was no opposing hand to hold it back. It slid easily through the hole and dangled upon his breast. Then, as his eyes turned seaward again, his heart almost ceased to beat.

Rounding a bold, jutting promontory a mile or more to the southward, a monstrous gray shape was plowing through the placid waters of the harbor. Smoke in black clouds belched from her stacks. Clouds of spray were flung up on either side of her bow. At her stern the wind whipped and tossed the folds of a flag which meant everything to the bewildered secret-service agent.

For a second he sat there dazed and uncomprehending at this seeming miracle. Then his face took on an expression of suave, smiling satisfaction.

"Another time, my dear captain, or colonel, or whatever your rank may be," he murmured, "you'll believe what I say."

There was no answer, and, turning, he saw the Japs scurrying to cover among the rocks, leaving the center of the plateau quite empty save for the tall figure of Jack Bellamy coming toward him with swift, eager strides, his face radiant.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RELAY IN TIME.

AN hour later, the secretary of the navy leaned easily against the starboard rail of the warship, his keen eyes roaming over the waste of rock and sand stretched out before him.

"It's very simple, Darrell," he said, reaching for his cigarette case. "Saltus relayed your wireless to me at Panama, and I realized in an instant how serious the affair was likely to be. Happily the Pacific squadron had sailed only a few hours before, and it was an easy matter to order the *Wyoming* to put back at once. The world at large will suppose, of course, that I am merely making an unwarrantable display." He smiled and extended his case. "The conservative newspapers will roar against the sinful waste of utilizing a first-class battleship for such a purpose. But that is

one of the minor annoyances one has to put up with."

The secret-service agent selected a cigarette from the extended case, and lit it. For a moment he stood silent, staring idly forward across the empty stretch of water to the spot where Harrington Ives' yacht had lain anchored two days before.

"If there should ever be another occasion," he said lightly, "I hope you won't time your arrival quite so close. I told this head Jap that you'd show up yesterday, and I was really beginning

to be afraid you were going to make me out a pretty bad guesser."

The secretary stared. "You told him we were coming!" he repeated, in astonishment. "How did you know?"

Darrell shrugged his shoulders. "I knew you simply *had* to come if you got our message," he said, smiling. I played that card as a bluff, but you considerably slipped it into my hand when the show-down came. I did not tell them it would be the *Wyoming*. I said the *Chicago* was coming. But I guess that was near enough."



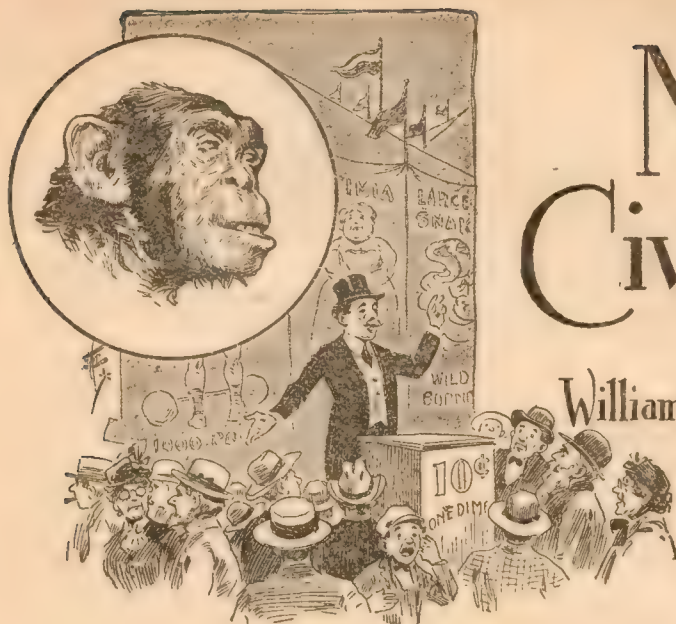
THERE AND HERE

By Edgar Chippendale

HERE an' there a teardrop,
 Here an' there a song,
 Here an' there a hand reached
 Just to help you 'long
 Shadows deep a-flittin'
 Right afore your way,
 But always comes a somethin'
 Keeps you middlin' gay.

Here an' there a desert,
 Here an' there a flower,
 Here an' there the sunlight
 Breakin' thro' a shower.
 Summer skies of azure,
 Winter skies of gray,
 But always comes a somethin'
 Keeps you middlin' gay.

Here an' there the cruel,
 Here an' there the kind,
 Here an' there a bird's song
 Floatin' down the wind.
 Very strange the mixture
 Life gives every day,
 But always comes a somethin'
 Keeps you middlin' gay.



Not Civilized-

By
William Carlton Davis.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

BOOKED FOR DEPARTURE.

THE decree had gone forth. Joe must go. The big ape was no longer an attraction at the health resort. On the contrary, the owner of the place had been frankly told by accustoming visitors that unless he got rid of Joe he would have to do without their patronage. They spent their good money with him copiously enough to give their wants weight, and so no great amount of time was lost in arriving at a decision to dispose of Joe.

Henry, keeper of Joe, gardener, hostler, man of all work, had been the first to receive word of the decision. He seemed to be a sort of bosom friend, a pal of the ape, on sufficiently friendly and intimate terms with him to be entitled to the honor of being the first to know of the resort proprietor's determination. Besides, the resort owner

had never been able to acquire any standing at all with Joe. That's why he decided to "tell it to Henry."

Henry stood in front of the cage in which was the man ape. On each of his hips he rested a grimy hand. As he gazed at the solemn-visaged simian, he put the situation to him in his own way:

"You boob! I tol' you what will happen. Boss goin' sell you. Why you don't be good monkey—huh? Vell, I guess I say good-by. By golly, I can nodding else do."

A circus representative in the person of Bill Quick, better known as "Big Bill," had signified his willingness to come out and give Joe the once over.

"If he's bad, we'll take him," Bill had written, in response to the resort manager. "We're running a wild-animal show, see? The wilder they are, the better we like 'em. And that ain't no press-agent stuff." So it was arranged.

Joe had been the chief animal attraction of the Mineral Baths Zoo for several seasons, but he had been baited by "roughneck" visitors until he had become an animated tempest, every ounce of his ninety-odd pounds being in open revolt against everything human; save and except Henry.

This uncouth and unlovely fellow from some country across the sea had somehow found the one soft spot in that wild simian heart. He wielded a strange power over the brute all unconsciously, which made it the more uncanny. He alone could enter the cage of the ape and find a welcome. Just why this was went down as an unsolvable mystery.

It could not be because Henry fed him, for other employees about the resort performed that service at times. It was not because Henry alone was kind; others connected with the establishment were at least not unkind. They valued their jobs too highly.

Perhaps he was just crazy. An alienist, spending a week at the place, seemed to think so. "The animal is undoubtedly insane," he declared. "I have had him under observation for a week, and, while I use the word 'insane' with reservations, I think I may safely say that he is insane. Let me qualify my statements in this wise: It is a mooted question whether any other animal than the genus homo, man, has a reasoning brain intellect, and is privileged to go crazy. Naturally, without that, it could hardly be said that a monkey was insane to the extent that he may be, or may have been, rather, deprived of his reasoning faculties. Still, in the ape, which animal bears the nearest resemblance to man, we frequently observe actions approaching human intelligence."

After a moment's pause, the alienist went on: "While I would not care to be quoted as stating unqualifiedly that Joseph, or Joe, as you are pleased to

call him, is a lunatic, I have no hesitancy in stating, following the observations that I have been privileged to make during the past seven days, that he is not normal mentally.

"This remarkable show of affection for the man Henry, who, if the facts have not been misrepresented to me, has treated him no better than numerous other employees about the place, bears me out in my diagnosis to a degree. It is a species of mania. Such cases in humans have frequently come under my personal observation in asylums for the insane, and, I may add, outside such institutions. It is a typical case of inordination.

"I hope," continued the man of science, looking about with a show of concern and lively personal interest, "if there are any newspaper men present, they will—er—not misquote me. If I have not made myself clear—" He broke off, and allowed his manner to indicate his willingness to be interviewed.

Oh, no, they didn't misquote the learned gentleman. It wasn't at all necessary. For a week or more that ape and that alienist made plenty of live copy, and the follow-up stories were clever and entertaining. Photo engravings of the ape and the doctor appeared side by side, appropriately underlined.

Henry sized up the situation in vastly fewer words than the alienist, and much more to the point: "Joe not crazy—jes' dam' fool," he sagely declared; and those who knew agreed.

CHAPTER II.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

BILL QUICK and an assistant came to get Joe if he measured up to McGhan's, the resort owner's, specifications.

"He's too tough a customer for us," said McGhan. "We're running a gen-

teel resort, and this Turk is getting us in bad. He's an all-right animal for a circus, though. But take it from me, you've got to look out for him. He's sure one bad hombre. Don't try to be affectionate with him. You poke your mitt inside his cage, and—good night mitt! He'd just tear it out by the roots. He's just about as affectionate as a buzz saw going through a knot. I'm telling you this so if anything happens they won't be no come-back."

"Much obliged, old man, for putting us hep," Quick said. "It would be mighty tough"—with a wink at his assistant—"if this here monk got out of his cage and got rough with the lions, or broke open the elephant's trunk. Nothing like being forewarned. Of course, as you suggest, we assume all responsibility. We've got an extra lion or two, anyhow, and also maybe we could rustle up another elephant or so if anything happened, such as breaking up the set."

Bill spoke as one who was not unmindful of the seriousness of the situation, yet trying to put the other at ease. But he wasn't having much success. McGhan seemed to sense that he was being "kidded."

"Well, let's go take a look at this bad boy, anyhow," broke in Big Bill.

On the way to the zoo, McGhan sought to impress Bill with the blood-thirstiness of Joe; and Bill, with an air of seriousness that disarmed suspicion, almost, insisted that he would take every precaution.

"Now, Mac"—he was getting real chummy—"don't you worry none. Our cages are all made of Bessemer steel, double-jointed, cross-barred, riveted, soldered, welded, and with double hog chains. We never had an animal get out of a cage yet, and you hear me, we ain't going to begin with Joe. When he comes over to our little show, he comes as a permanent guest, a permanent guest. Some of 'em don't like it

there at first, but we just naturally make 'em like it. In no time they see that we're good folks—folks that they can tie to."

Bill's two-pound gold watch chain rattled against his linen vest as he walked, and with his big hands he emphasized and punctuated his statements. They entered the baths zoo.

"Take it easy, now," cautioned Bill. "I want to see this fellow before he sees me. Get where we can take a slant at him without him being wise to us."

Approaching in a roundabout fashion, McGhan as pilot, the three reached the vicinity of Joe's cage and were able to see without being seen, through the cracks of a board fence.

"Easy, now; no noise!"

Bill put his eyes to a crack. "By the holy jumping kangaroo, this Henry is in the cage with him! Say, Mac, how about this? You said——"

McGhan interrupted: "Thought you knew about him. On the level, he's the only living man who can get near him. The monk is crazy stuck on him."

Bill's eyes went back to the crack. He saw the man and the near-man in each other's arms. The big ape was nestling against the other's breast, whining and sad-eyed. Henry was stroking him down the back and about the head with one big hand, while he crooned to him, as though to soften the parting:

"Don't you mind, Joe. You have good time now. No more don't you be dam' fool. Be good if circus man take you. Anyhow, next year come back circus; I see you sure. Vell, I say good-by, Joe. I got go work."

Henry essayed to leave, but it was not so easy. The big ape clung to him in unutterable despair, big tears rolling down his long face. Tenderly Henry removed the hairy arms; tenderly he shoved the ape away. With a dirty bandanna handkerchief the man made a clumsy dab or two at the brute's brim-

ming eyes, drew away from the clinging paws, and stood up. The ape slunk into a far corner of the cage, trembling, forlorn, heartbroken.

Henry backed out of the cage and fastened the door. "Brace up, Joe," he said. "You don' want circus man see you cry. Huh?"

Spellbound, the three men watched through the fence cracks. Never before had they beheld a parting such as this between the human and the brute, so near to each other in this one sad moment, yet separated by infinity in the eternal fitness of things.

Big Bill found his voice: "By Heaven, the monkey is crying! Quiet! Listen! If that monk isn't crying, I'm a hyena! If a woman— Huh, I never even had an animal love me like that." Bill's hand went to his head, and as it came slowly away, his sombrero came with it, and he stood reverently. "I've handled animals all my life"—turning to the others—"and I know 'em. But I never saw anything like that."

CHAPTER III.

TOO CIVILIZED.

AFTER a while, Bill Quick, with something like a choke in his voice, continued. "I've seen horses and dogs, and even wild animals," continued Bill, "mope around for a while after an owner or keeper went away—left or died. But that monk was shedding tears. Do you get that? He was actually crying and shedding tears! I want to tell you, folks, that for a couple of seconds he had my goat. And that ain't no advance notice. But I didn't observe this pal of his—this Henry boy—letting loose any of the briny; not a drop. What's the dope? It's this: He's too civilized. But Joe, he's different. He's gone back to nature. He picks out a friend and he sticks. He ain't promiscuous. You can't tell me nothing about animals. I know 'em,

wild and tame. Joe was crying because he loved, and he loved right. And them was tears he was shedding. I can tame that monk. You can tame anything that can cry.

"Let's get down to business," he went on. "How much? Here, I'll tell you what I'll do. Throw in Henry, and I'll give you two hundred. He ain't worth it, but I'm just a little soft-hearted when it comes to parting friends. Without Henry, a hundred is my limit."

"You're on for the hundred," McGhan agreed. "The monk is yours. But you couldn't get Henry for a lot more. He isn't pretty to look at, but he's the best little gardener in these parts. If he drives a stake in the ground in the evening, you can look for him to pick roses off it the following day."

"All right. I've had my money's worth already. I've seen something." He peeled the bill off a roll big enough to ditch a circus train. "The monk was crying, all right; them was real tears. But not a peep from his pal. I can't make it out no other way than what I said—too civilized. Well, let's get out from behind this fence and take a close look at him. See if he's over his anguish. Don't seem to me he's as fierce as you say. Come on!"

The simian was still in the far corner of the cage, hunched up in a hairy bundle, quiet, disconsolate. The three came close, despite the admonitions of Henry. The gray bundle began to unwrap. With a fearful scream, the ape bounded to the bars, his hair bristling, his lips drawn back, baring his glistening teeth. He shook the cage in a frenzy, the bars bending under the strain of his incredible strength until it seemed that they would give way.

The onlookers jumped back in fear. The ape presented a terrifying sight. Scream after scream came from his throat. He was the wild brute in all his abysmal ferocity. Death—tearing,

sanguinary death—awaited the man who ventured within reach.

There was one man who dared. Henry approached the cage, waving aside the involuntary movement to intercept him. He thrust an arm between the bars. As if by magic, the screams ceased, the brute's lips closed over the cruel teeth, the fierce fire died out of the eyes, the bristling hair lay flat. The ferocity was gone, and in its stead was fawning tenderness.

"Good Lord! I wouldn't have done that for a season's gross!" Big Bill's voice was strained, and his face was pallid. "We've seen something, men. We've seen the two extremes of physical emotion—love and hate—to their last limit. And a monkey showed us. Say, I've never taken much stock in this Darwin, but after this I'm for him. And say"—addressing his companion—"get a real cage when you take Brother Joseph away. I've a notion that he dislikes captivity."

"Yes, that's right," put in McGhan; "one of the Bessemer steel kind; double-barred, double-jacketed, hog-chained, hog-tied, copper-riveted, triple-plated, and truss-rodged. And you might see that the elephant guard is doubled and the lion's cage is reënforced. They might get hurt. I guess that'll hold you for a while, little boy."

Bill laughed. "Ain't he the sarcastic thing? Say, Mac, you're all right, at that. It's on me. I gotta hand it to you. That Joe is some monk. Bad? He's the worst beast I ever saw on two legs or four. He'd make a pack of wolves look like puppies at play. But I saw him cry—real tears!"

CHAPTER IV.

"JOE'S LOVE TO HENRY."

THE departure of Joe to become one of the animal attractions of The Greatest of All Shows made no apparent difference in the daily routine of

Henry's life. He was the same hard-working, tireless fellow. If he sorrowed, there was no trace of it in his expressionless countenance. If there lingered any regret in his soul, it did not show through those dreary eyes, performing their functions listlessly from puffed surroundings, which closed up and hid them from view when he grinned.

And then one day a letter came from Big Bill. It was written en route, and addressed to McGhan. He read:

"I thought for a while that we were going to lose Joe. For a week he wouldn't touch food. Of course nobody but me knew what was the matter with him. He was just pining for Henry, that's all. The vet undertook to give him some dope one day. He won't try it again. His folks like to see him come home in one piece, and he tries to humor them in these little matters. I had an idea that maybe a little companionship with one of his kind might cheer Joe up a bit, so we put a female ape in the cage with him.

"In consequence, we are shy one perfectly good female ape. She knew she was going to her doom. She squealed like a pig when we got her near Joe's cage, and we had a hard time putting her inside. It was no love scene. Joe was on her with a scream and a leap and tore her to pieces. I've seen some tough sights among circus animals; but I had no stomach for that, and I had to turn away. It sickened me. It wasn't blood Joe was after—not him! It was just his way of showing that he wasn't pining for anything under our tent. It's Henry he wants to see. I'd give a lot just to be loved like that by anything alive.

"Well, we scraped—scraped is right!—the remains out of the cage with a long-handled rake. Joe seemed to pick up after that. He had showed—I guess he figured it out that way—that he was true, and it seemed to satisfy him. He

is beginning to eat, and is now fine and dandy, though he is still savage as all get-out. I'd let loose of a considerable piece of change if Henry could pay him a visit. It would cheer Joe up a bit. After here, we go to Chicago for a week, and then on East. I'm inclosing our route. Best regards to you, and give Joe's love to Henry."

When Henry had heard the letter read, his face expanded into a grin that made mere slits of his eyes.

"Ain't you got something you can send Joe—a love token?" asked McGhan.

Henry removed his cap and scratched his head. From that action sprang an idea.

"He like this old cap purty good. Some time he put 'im on. I got nudder one. I give old one to Joe. I was' little."

"No, don't wash it. He wouldn't recognize it. And, besides, I don't think it will stand a bath. Send it just as it is. Here, give it to me. I'd like to be there when Joe gets this lid."

The old cap, little more than a rag, was expressed, and in due time another letter came from Big Bill to McGhan. Here it is:

"That was a great little idea of yours—sending Henry's old cap to Joe. I stuck it on the end of a long pole and passed it in through the bars. Joe jumped at it with a scream, but when he got one sniff of it and recognized the odor of his old pal, I thought he would go crazy. It was a sight for sore eyes.

"Joe chattered over that old rag of a cap, folding it and hugging it, just a-talking to himself like a lunatic. He's just crazy in love with that Swede or Dutchman, or whatever he is. It must be great to be loved like that, even by a dumb beast. And I don't believe that gardener of yours appreciates it. I've been a circus man too long to be soft-hearted, but when I saw the way that monkey took to that old, empty cap,

there was a lump in my throat and mist in my eyes. Joe seems to like me a little better now than he did, though not enough to cause any jealousy on Henry's part. Send along something else."

The letter closed with best wishes and "a kiss from Joe to Henry."

Henry and Bill were human contrasts. The circus man was big, full-blooded, commanding, accustomed to being obeyed. He loved animals because he could teach them to love him; though he felt for the most part, and regretted it, that their regard for him was born of fear. All his tempestuous life he had craved for real love, and it had been denied him. He could not have been driven an inch against his will by any man, but the love of a woman could have made of him a slave.

Henry, small of stature, born to toil, accustomed to taking orders and carrying them out, had no romance in his make-up. The spark had never been awakened in him. He had no desire but to do the bidding of the man who paid him his wage. And he would do that despite anything and everything, if within human power. Whatever his dull, unreasoning mind prompted him as the thing to do, he would do, weighing no possible result to himself as against the hazard of personal safety. He was not brave; he just didn't know fear.

CHAPTER V.

JOE PLAYS GUARDIAN.

THE Greatest of All Shows continued its halting journey toward the Atlantic coast, playing the big cities of the Eastern States to big business. Always at the cage of Joe was a special attendant, keeping the venturesome at a safe distance and discouraging the tossing into the cage of peanuts, candy, and other circus truck. The practice had been known to throw Joe into a fit of rage on occasions, and the circus

men did not care to see him in that mood.

"Think that cage is safe?" asked the property man of Joe's keeper, stopping at the ape's cage. "Looks a trifle shaky near that corner."

"Well, every time he has one of his fits, I look for a quick out for me," enlightened the keeper. "He don't like me none, nohow."

"If he got out, there might be the devil to pay. You have your orders: If he gets out, plug him, and plug him quick."

"No foolin'," was the laconic retort. The inspector passed on.

Now we come to an incident that occurred at a "stand" well on toward the coast. It was great show weather, and vast crowds were pouring into the grounds early. Trains, boats, autos, and horse-drawn vehicles unloaded their quota of humanity, and attendance records were due to be shattered. The peanut, ice-cream, and red lemonade stands were getting the small change, and the side shows were playing to big business, aided and abetted by the spielers, together with the huge banners and the exaggerated pictures.

"Right this way, now, ladies and gentlemen! We have here the little people, the little cattle, the wild men from Borneo, the woolly horse, the mare without hair, the wild head-hunters from the Philippine Islands, and many others too numerous to mention. They're alive, living, breathing. The large pictures you see before you give you only a faint idea of the stupendous show we are giving you for a dime, ten cents. Get your tickets! Remember, the big show does not start for half an hour. There is plenty of time. Get your tickets! A dime, ten cents!"

The young and the old, the rich and the poor, representatives of every nation under the sun, rubbed elbows in that motley, madding throng. The cir-

cus—the oldest amusement institution in the world—had its grip upon them.

"See one and you've seen 'em all."

Thousands who had heard that phrase, if not uttered it themselves, were there. Some were hiding behind their children—"the kids." Others made the excuse that they merely came to see the big thriller—some death-defying act; the rest of the show was a bore.

The animal tent filled early. The sign under Joe's cage, "Dangerous; Keep Away!" had its psychological effect. Danger has always lured. Joe, watchful, alert, hate glowing from under his shaggy brows, shared stellar honors with the jungle kings sprawling sleepily in their hot cages. They were not dangerous, like Joe.

A young fellow pressed through the crowd about Joe's cage and elbowed a place at the ropes for his lady friend.

He carried a slender cane on which was a red pennant, and a straw hat sat jauntily on the side of his head, showing a carefully combed lock of hair down his forehead. The girl, with lips apart, munched a large wad of gum. She was happy and carefree.

She read the sign: "Look out, kid; he's a dangerous guy."

"Quit yer kiddin'! Say, if he heard a hand organ, he'd be lookin' for his tin cup."

Encouraged by the laughter his sally provoked, the young man reached over and made a playful swish toward Joe.

A blood-freezing scream, half human, half animal, drove the smile from his lips and choked back a half-formed jest. Joe sprang forward in a fury, shrieking madly. With unbelievable strength he attacked the imprisoning bars. Faces paled and eyes set with terror as the crowd fell back before that onslaught of rage.

The ape wrenched at the bars, found the inevitable weak spot, and in a trice had forced two far enough apart for

his slender body. There was a flash of gray, and he was free—a screaming menace.

The keeper's automatic cracked once. Joe scuttled on all fours toward the center of the tent, his mouth wide open, his hair bristling, his body taut with rage and hate.

With that fleeing, struggling mass of people as a background, the keeper instantly saw the futility of trying a second shot.

The throng was in the throes of a panic. Exits were jammed with frantic people in their efforts to get out and away—anywhere from the hideous, screaming monster. Some dodged between the cages and went out under the tent.

Women screamed and gathered to them sobbing children. Those on the outskirts of the crowd, in ignorance of what had occurred, struggled to reach the center, demanding to know what had happened.

Between the outer and the inner circle of the crowd, midway, the struggling throngs came together like the backwash of a spent billow meeting another breaker coming in from the sea. The confusion was beyond adequate description.

The enraged ape, uttering savage cries, continued his course, terror-stricken people fleeing before him. In his path a little girl stumbled and fell. The mad ape swept her to him with a sinewy arm. A groan went up from the crowd. The ape stopped for a moment. Apparently he was satisfied. His fury had demanded a victim. He had his price in his arms.

"My God! Doris!" screamed a woman. "Frank, save her!" She swooned.

The man drew a revolver and started toward the ape, who had leaped with his burden upon a pile of baled straw.

"Drop that gun!"

It was the strong voice of Big Bill

Quick. The man heard and hesitated. He seemed suddenly to recognize the danger of a shot. Helplessly he gazed upon his captive child. Then he turned toward his wife, who was being cared for by strangers. He seemed bewildered, weak, impotent. With a groan he stumbled into the arms of the nearest man. The pistol fell to the ground.

CHAPTER VI.

CALL FOR A CRACK SHOT.

THE tumult increased. Above the human din rose the shrill trumpeting of an elephant. Another and yet another pachyderm echoed the call, and the thundering roar of a lion awakened from his lethargy vibrated through the tent. Other caged denizens of the jungle lifted up their hoarse voices, augmenting the terror. It was as though the jungle had suddenly loosed its wild creatures.

Holding the center of the stage in that frightful drama was Joe, with the little girl held to his breast by one long, muscular arm. He half crouched, the knuckles of the free arm resting on the straw. Over his shoulders spread the child's golden curls. She had been frightened into insensibility at the first grip of the monster. Her eyes were closed. It was the face of a sleeping angel; Beauty and the beast in reality.

Joe had ceased his screaming, but was still growling and grunting savagely. He surveyed the multitude with quick little movements of his head, his beady eyes glaring from under his beetling brows. Of all within that huge tent he was the one unafraid.

A thousand pairs of eyes focused on the two—the ape, embodiment of wild brute force and cruelty; the child, personification of beauty and purity. The sight was at once revolting and fascinating. It held the crowd as though by a hypnotic spell. Anguish, fear, terror, despair, and desperation were written

in variety on the blanched, tense faces of the throng.

Joe was growing quieter. The novelty of his liberty was wearing away. His fury had abated. The storm had passed—tragedy had at least been deferred. The crescendo of sound had reached its height and was now dying away in a steady diminuendo.

Bill Quick now had the situation well in hand, and his uniformed underlings were keeping the crowd in a wide circle. Suggestions were being shouted from all sides, but the crowd soon recognized in Bill a leader worthy their trust. Quick snapped his orders like a general, his big voice carrying far and clear:

"Keep back, everybody, and keep quiet! Don't try to shoot! Don't attempt a rescue! Wait! You men—put up the sides of all the cages containing the big cats! Jump lively!"

Bill addressed the crowd, as this was being attended to: "We can't all give orders. You've got to trust me. A human life is at stake. If any of you ever prayed, pray now for the life of the little girl. She isn't hurt—yet. She's just scared stiff. All we can do is keep quiet and trust in Providence."

A hoarse voice rose from the rear: "If that kid is killed, somebody'll be the——"

A rough but timely hand choked back the rest of it.

"Put him out!"

The offender was none too gently passed back through the crush.

"Can't we do anything?" wailed a voice, shaking with anxiety.

Bill shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he said helplessly. Then he straightened up. "Wait! I think there's a way. If the parents of the child are here, I want to talk to them. Where are they?"

His eyes swept the circle searchingly. "Here!"

A man and a woman were thrust forward. The woman, recovered from

her swoon, was whimpering. The man was trying to comfort her. Their handkerchiefs were wet with tears.

"Kindly step this way, please." Bill's voice was gentle now. "Try to keep your eyes away from——" He indicated the pair in the center. "It is better," he explained.

The eyes of the throng followed the two wonderingly as they walked haltingly to where Bill stood on a platform.

"Folks," the circus man said, addressing them, "we have with this show a cowboy who can hit a penny with his rifle nine times out of ten at fifty paces. I'd even gamble on the tenth time. If the man is willing, and you are willing, and He is willing, up there——"

Bill uncovered his head as he looked aloft, and then waited for their answer.

"If she was mine, I'd take the chance," he said.

Father and mother looked in each other's eyes for a brief instant. Each saw consent in the other's face. The mother fell into her husband's arms. He caught a smothered "yes," and nodded acquiescence to Bill.

"Get Texas! Quick!" ordered Bill to a man in uniform. The man hurried away.

CHAPTER VII.

WHILE TEXAS WAITED.

A SHAFT of sunlight shone through a rift in the tent and fell full upon the ape's face. He blinked and shifted his position. The ray fell over the golden curls. They shone like burnished gold. A murmur went through the crowd. It was a good omen. Joe showed little concern, and, save for occasional quick glances about him and little grunts of satisfaction, seemed oblivious to his surroundings. But Big Bill knew the sleeping volcano that lurked beneath that calm exterior.

If he could only prevent an outbreak

until the arrival of Texas! Presently the rifleman appeared, weapon in hand. He had been apprised of the situation, and knew what was expected of him.

"Can you do it, Texas?" asked Bill.

"Sure."

The father thrust out a hand toward the cowboy. It was full of coin. Some of it spilled to the ground. "I was going to buy the little girl a gold bracelet with this," he said.

Texas merely glanced at it. "Well, buy it," he said. "The management pays me." Then he turned to his gun. He threw open the breech and slipped in a cartridge.

"Between the eyes," whispered Bill. "Sure."

Texas stepped forward a few paces. Bill raised his hand for silence. The cowboy halted thirty paces from the ape and brought his rifle to his shoulder. The silence was broken by the sharp intake of many breaths. Joe turned his head quickly, as though scenting danger. There was a flash of white teeth.

Texas lowered his rifle and waited for the ape to turn his head toward him. Again Bill lifted a silencing hand. Texas knelt. Again he brought his weapon up and painstakingly fitted the butt to his shoulder. Carefully he laid his cheek against it.

Some turned their eyes away; others put their hands to their ears to shut out the report. Two or three weak hearts gave way under the hammering strain, and their owners fell fainting.

Why didn't he shoot? Seconds were like hours.

A commotion at the edge of the circle attracted the attention of Quick. A guard was trying to keep back a man who was struggling to get through the crush. He was undersized, with a round, full face and little eyes. Bill

saw, and quick recognition galvanized him into action.

"Texas!" he called out. "Wait!"

"Sure." The man lowered his rifle and turned to Bill.

"Let that man through!" commanded Quick.

The guard was accustomed to obeying that voice without argument or inquiry. The little man, suddenly released, fell sprawling. Scrambling to his feet, he looked about in a dazed way a second, then he sprang toward Joe and the child that was in his arms. But the great ape had already seen his friend. With an animal cry of recognition, he started forward, and Henry met him halfway.

Then something happened that made Big Bill Quick catch his breath, made Texas the rifleman wonder if he was awake or dreaming, and caused the father and the mother of the child to approach with thanksgiving and confidence.

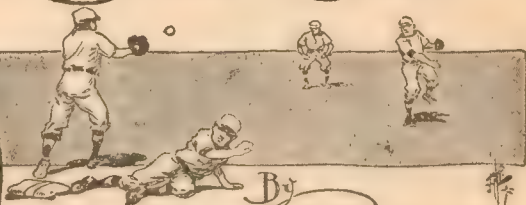
In the presence of the awe-struck throng, Joe stretched forth his arms, and as Henry received the inert form of the child, its former guardian, the ape, as if glad to intrust the little one to his tried-and-true man friend, released his hold on the precious burden.

The mother, now at Henry's side, quickly received her child, and as she bore it off the people began to cheer.

At the same moment, Joe leaped into Henry's arms, and put his own hairy ones around the gardener, while the big tears rolled down his long face just as they did that day when Big Bill and the others were looking through the cracks in the fence.

Amazement and sympathy were fighting for the front place in Big Bill's face. Words were wrestling for the use of his tongue, but not one crowded its way out.

Building a Ball Club—



By
George T. Stallings,
MANAGER OF THE
NATIONAL LEAGUE BOSTON TEAM
IN A TALK WITH
John N. Wheeler.

THEY say I have built up a lot of ball clubs out of nothing. I would rather be running a team that I had put together myself, than to be handed a herd of stars and try to make them play baseball. Perhaps that is the reason."

The speaker was George T. Stallings, manager of the National League Boston team, who wins pennants and world's championships with clubs that experts have previously predicted to be tailenders.

"How do you take a ragged ball club and win?" I asked, and his detailed answer to the question follows:

I don't listen to the newspaper experts who cut out a nice niche in last place for me. I cross them. And then I put my ball players in a frame of mind to keep trying all the time.

Comiskey, a mighty smart baseball man, spent a lot of money to buy a team of stars, and he put them in charge of Clarence Rowland and a good manager, too, so far as I know. But Rowland was up against it from the get-away. In the first place, most of the men working for him were stars who had had their names in electric lights

outside of big-league ball parks for several seasons, and thought they had forgotten more baseball than this busher knew. And when you have a flock of stars working for you, you haven't got a ball club, but just a flock of prima donnas.

I had my experience with one prima donna when I was managing the New York Yankees, and, if it hadn't been for him, I would have won the pennant the next season with that club. It was a better ball team as it stood the day I gave up the job in New York than the Boston Braves were when they won the world's championship in 1914.

When I take a young ball player before he believes he is a star, I can teach him my way of playing baseball. And I hate big-league prima donnas. I can't make that too strong. Hal Chase is the prima donna who kept me from winning a championship for Frank Farrell when I was managing the Yankees, because he thought he ought to run the ball club. And Chase is one of the greatest baseball players I ever saw work.

The first thing I teach a young player is never to give up a ball game. If we had given up, as a team, after our bad



"Not a ball club, but just a flock of prima donnas."

start in 1914, and we had lots of reason to, I would not have a world's championship to my credit now. To win in baseball, you must never step back from the plate, no matter how fast they come.

The First Thing.

I HAVE a pretty complete card index of the available players in the minor leagues all over the country, and what they can do in the company they keep. As soon as a man comes to me I look first for one thing—his courage. If he shows lack of heart, or, more bluntly, a yellow streak, no matter if he looks like the best mechanical player in the world, I haven't room for him, since he is bound to throw you down in a pinch some day. And there are a million almost unconscious mannerisms of a player that will tip me off to a yellow streak, because I am watching for them.

To illustrate this point, I will tell a story of an outfielder on my club who was a good ball player, but who was inclined to show a little of the hound when things were breaking tough for him. It was about two weeks before the world's series of 1914, when we were closing up the season with the Giants at the Polo Grounds. This outfielder lost two fly balls that he should have caught in his pocket, but he stalled on them. After the second one, when he came to the bench, I said:

"Get out of this ball game and out of the park. I don't ever want to see you around again. No yellow dogs can play on my ball club."

I drove that ball player right out of the park then. Some managers would not take such a chance of breaking up a club just before an important series, but I knew I had either to make this chap show his mettle or quit. He came around to me that night and asked for another chance, and he turned out to be one of the real stars of the series.

We went into the 1914 world's series on the short end, an outsider, for our opponents, the strong Athletics, were regarded as much superior to my ball club. I had to keep up the fighting spirit and convince our players they could beat any aggregation. I predicted before the first game was played that we would win in four straight; that from my experience in the American League I knew enough about the Athletics to beat them. Then I picked a fight with Connie Mack over letting us use his park for practice, and every ball player on the club took the field for the first game fighting mad.

The Fighting Heart.

AFTER I put the heart into a ball club, it is up to me to teach the men baseball, and to build a machine that will work together, but the fighting



"Lost two fly balls that he should have caught in his pocket."

heart is the most important thing. Gowdy was inclined to dog it when he first joined the team, being a little lazy. If ever a ball player had the fighting heart, it is Johnny Evers, and he jumped on Gowdy one day Hank was complaining about having to catch every afternoon.

"I play second base every day, don't I?" barked Evers. "You've got no kick coming. You ought to be glad to get the chance!" After that, Gowdy was around begging to catch.

Teaching baseball is a hard job. I believe the manager, to do it right, should be with his players continuously, both on and off the field. When my ball club is on the road, I am always around with the players, and especially the younger ones. You don't find me with acquaintances or at shows in the evening in the various cities, but you can always locate me hanging around the hotel lobby, talking with my ball players, and trying to give them some ideas of the game.

When the team is scheduled to play on its home grounds, we have morning practice every day of the season, if the weather is fit, and we have real morning practice, too, with the players in their uniforms and out hustling. They do not just report, but every man on my ball club has got to be out there and working, even the most important

prima donna, if I had one. But there are no prima donnas on my team. Every player is treated the same, and fairly.

Toward the end of the 1914 season, I needed a third baseman badly, so I made a trade with Brooklyn which brought Red Smith to Boston. He reported to me late one afternoon after the game was over.

"Well, I'll see you to-morrow afternoon and go to work," he said, as he started away.

"To-morrow morning at ten," I corrected.

"Why to-morrow morning?" he asked. "To-morrow isn't a holiday. There isn't any morning game."

"But this ball club has morning practice."

"Morning practice!" he hollered, surprised. "Why, we haven't had any morning practice in Brooklyn since May."

"And look where Brooklyn is in the standing of the clubs. You will report for morning practice here every day at ten until we have played our last ball game."

Smith became one of the most enthusiastic rooters for my system, and one of the hardest players on the club. Brooklyn managers had had trouble getting along with him, and for that reason he was traded to me. He had



"I wore out three pairs of trousers sliding."

some tough luck, and broke his leg just before the big series.

A Plea for Superstition.

WHEN my ball club is on the road, all the players meet me in my room every morning at eleven o'clock and talk things over. We figure on what pitcher is liable to work for the enemy against us that afternoon, and how best to beat him. We go over his weaknesses and lay out a plan of campaign, knowing the style of the club we are to meet. Many a ball game has been won in those morning sessions. You see, we have to manage with the first guess, while the fans can manage with the second. This constant pounding of baseball into players is a grand thing. I want my men to eat baseball, think baseball, and sleep baseball. They can't get too much. In this particular, the scrappy John Evers is the ideal type of player.

Another peculiar thing is that I encourage my players to be superstitious. I am superstitious myself, and I believe this makes better ball players. All great stars have had their superstitions when they believe specific omens make things break right for them. If a player has put on his shirt in a certain way, and goes out that afternoon and gets four hits, I want him to put on his shirt that same way every day. He is going to believe then that he is set to bust the ball. And he generally does, too.

During the season of 1914 I was forced to stop my automobile four or five blocks from the ball park one day and walk the rest of the way, because of the big crowd blocking the street. We won that ball game and won it easily. For more than a week I continued to stop my automobile in the same spot, and walk to the park, although on the other days there was no crowd to make it necessary. I would have still been stopping it there if we had not lost a game after a week or so. But we ran into a winning streak on that first afternoon that extended over a week, and you could not have got me to come any closer to the park with my car so long as it lasted. And I hate to win the opening ball game of a season. That means a bad year.

I know I have the reputation of raving on the bench, and I guess I do. I call my players hard names and keep after them, so that nothing will be left undone to win games. But as soon as the battle is over, I forget it all, and they know me and don't take offense at what I have said to them during the heat of a game. I get terribly excited myself during a hard contest, and slide up and down the bench so much that I drive all my players off the seat, and they are draped around the bench like a fringe. I don't put on a uniform, so don't get on the field, and, during the 1914 season, I wore out three pairs of trousers from sliding on close, excit-



"If an umpire figures a team have their heads down."

ing plays. At last I had a pair built with a leather seat.

My ball clubs have been charged with everything, from umpire ragging to signal stealing. I never stole a sign in my life by artificial means, but the fight my team puts up to win often makes our opponents think we are "getting something." I do not urge my players to keep after the umpires. Whenever a club of mine goes into a battle, however, I want it all worked up and out there scrapping. Most any team that is full of fight is liable to keep after an umpire when he calls a bad one. Umpires make mistakes, and it hurts to have a close one called against you in a tight game.

The Athletics were the only great ball club I can think of offhand which did not keep after the umpires. And they were a pretty colorless gang, too. It doesn't hurt a ball club any to kick on the close ones. If an umpire figures a team has a lot of players with their heads down, and that they are not going to holler, no matter what he hands them, he will give them the worst of every close one. An "ump" does not like to be ridden, and, if you holler on a close one, he cannot change that, but he will give you the edge on the next one. At least, that is the way with most umpires. Of course, you have got to figure them out as individuals, too, but this rule applies to the general run.

The Chief, Asset.

STALLINGS was talking in a New York hotel where his team generally stops. At this juncture a young player came up to him.

"I am going out to a moving-picture show, George," he said. "I'll be back by eleven o'clock."

"All right," said Stallings.

"You know," continued the miracle man, "I have little trouble with players not behaving themselves. I don't lay down very strict training rules. I can soon tell, however, by his looks whether a player is taking care of himself or not. I want them all to be in bed by midnight and up by eight o'clock in the morning. Some managers think moving pictures hurt a player's batting eye, but the only time I have ever found the movies hurting a player's batting average has been when he has told me so. It furnishes a great alibi.

"Any day Frank Baker did not get a hit, he'd say: 'Well, I'm going to lay off those movies after this. They hurt my eyes so I can't see the ball the next day.' Billy Evans, the umpire, calls them eye medicine.

"But when prosperity touches a ball club, and the players begin to buy automobiles, there will be bad effects. I keep my men out of cars in the summertime. In the first place, I think the wind and the dust hurt a ball player's eyes. Then he is always running the

risk of hurting himself either in an accident or by cranking the car. Big leaguers are delicate pieces of bric-a-brac. Besides, an automobile is a temptation for a player to sit up at night and run around, and no ball player can do that and be on a championship ball club. Automobiles hurt my team after our victory in 1914 when the players made good money, and most of them bought cars. I have put my foot down against them since. They don't go with me during the playing season."

"Have you a car yourself?"

"I used to have one, but I haven't now."

"Although I rave on the bench and bawl players out, I have never fined a man on a ball club I managed. I don't believe in it. Some great managers, like McGraw, Chance, and even Connie Mack, have always used this method, but each leader must do things his own way, and not try to imitate. I don't believe in taking a player's cash. Most of my men have real confidence in me as a result. And I can't stand a boss who tries to run the club on the field."

"What do you think," I asked Stallings, "is the greatest asset of a big leaguer?"

"Courage," he replied promptly. "Give me a man with nerve, even if he carries only mediocre ability. There are lots of ball players as good as Ty Cobb, but they haven't Ty's nerve. The bush leagues are full of good ball players with yellow feathers, and they will always stay in the bush leagues. There is no room on a big leaguer's uniform for the yellow feather."

No Gentleman

MISTRESS: "Who was the gentleman who came in just now, Mary?"

Mary: "That wasn't no gentleman,

mum. It was only the master come back for his umbrella."

Strike Nothing!

By Arthur E. Scott

IN the last half of the ninth inning a village baseball team was deprived of the services of one of its players, who was seriously hurt.

Not having any substitute available, the captain looked around the crowd of spectators, and noticing a tall, well-built, athletic-looking chap, who had just come in with a motor cycle, he asked him to fill the vacancy, and the stranger readily assented. There were two out and two on base when the newcomer went to bat.

Winding up, the pitcher flashed a ball across the center of the plate, but the batsman made no attempt to hit it.

"Strike one!" called the umpire.

"Strike nothing," retorted the batter. "I didn't hit anything."

It took some minutes to straighten out the argument that followed; but at last matters were explained to the satisfaction of the man at the bat.

The next ball was wide, and the umpire called: "Ball one!" Again the game was delayed while the batter learned the meaning of this decision.

The third ball was pitched; the novice met it with a resounding whack, driving it straight across center field and over the boundary fence.

"Run, you boob; run home!" yelled the crowd, wild at the thought of a certain victory for the home team.

Throwing down his bat, the greenhorn turned and faced the crowd. "Run home!" he exclaimed. "What for?" Putting his hand in his pocket, he pulled out a roll of bills. "Why should I run home?" he asked. "I've plenty of money to pay for another ball."

Subsequent investigation proved that the substitute batter was an Englishman!

Peril Invisible



By *Albert M. Treynor*

THE town of Blessington, more usually called "Powdertown," had sprung into existence on account of the great Pollux Powder Mills, where Gerald Thorpe, president of the company, reared his "war babies." A wireless message, signed "Out of the Blue Sky," threatened to blow up Dry House No. 7 by a long-distance igniter unless five hundred thousand dollars was paid to the senders. The president ignored the threat, and the dry house was destroyed.

The chief of the secret service at Washington took the matter up, and sent Henry Raymond, an ordnance officer, and formerly a lieutenant in the United States cavalry, to investigate the affair. Raymond, without disclosing his name or mission, made his way, unannounced, into Thorpe's office. Here he found a girl in tears, talking to the president, and he heard the man mention the name "Winston." Winston was the chief chemist in charge of the laboratories at the mills, and was of special interest to Raymond because he was known to have been working on an

invention to explode dynamite by wireless.

A somewhat stormy interview followed, when the president discovered Raymond's presence, but the lieutenant learned nothing that would assist him in his task.

On account of his military training, Raymond had no trouble in obtaining a position as a guard in the mills, as Captain Scott, who was in charge, preferred ex-soldiers for this work. On his first day, Raymond discovered that one of his comrades was a man named Blodgett, whom he had known in the army. Blodgett recognized the lieutenant at once, but Raymond was able to secure the man's silence by intimating that he knew him to be a deserter.

Raymond afterward found the girl, whom he had seen in Thorpe's office, in Winston's laboratory, where she was destroying some papers. She explained her presence there by telling him she was Wilda Winston, and that she was waiting for her uncle, the chemist.

Several further explosions having taken place in the works, President Thorpe seemingly consented to pay the

amount demanded, and packages supposed to contain money were sent on a barge down the river, as the black-mailers asked. The barge was followed by Raymond and several other guards in rowboats. No one appeared to claim the money, but Winston, the company's chemist, was arrested for being found in the proximity of the barge.

Later on, Raymond was on guard on the water front. His suspicions were aroused by a yacht, on the deck of which he saw a big, white umbrella, which had appeared just before the previous explosion. He was about to take a boat to go out and investigate, when his relief—Private Blodgett—interrupted him. Blodgett accused Raymond of being concerned in the explosions, but the lieutenant stopped him sharply. "That'll be enough!" he said. "And listen, Blodgett," he went on. "I don't care what you think or whom you suspect. Your cue just now is to lie low and say absolutely nothing."

"Oh, I guess not!" declared the private, in rising accents. "You think you can send me off to Leavenworth for being an army deserter. Well, maybe you can. But you've bluffed me long enough. Thorpe's offer of that reward just fixes things up proper." With a short, snarling laugh, he thrust his hand downward, jerked his revolver from its holster, and leveled the muzzle straight at the pit of Raymond's stomach. "Now," he cried, "you can march back to barracks and tell them who you are! Tell them about me, too, if you want. I can afford to do my own bit if the price is right. And ten thousand dollars is about my size."

CHAPTER XVI.

Plans in Danger.

RAYMOND never dreamed the renegade soldier would go so far as to commit himself to open hostilities, and, as a consequence, he was taken un-

aware. Blodgett's action was as quick as it was unexpected, and the lieutenant found himself covered before he could make a move in self-defense. He looked ruefully at the leveled revolver, mentally berating the private for the inopportune of his blundering interference. It was galling at such a moment to have his plans jeopardized by another man's stupid mistake. However, he faced the crisis with outward tranquillity. The situation was awkward, but not altogether hopeless.

As he stared contemptuously into the little, mean, squinting eyes that peered furtively out of the dusk, a sudden instinct seemed to tell him that in the actual test the man would lack the courage to pull the trigger. It was an even chance, at any rate, and worth accepting. He had started to go outside, and was standing on the narrow threshold of the sentry box, when Blodgett, from within, halted him. The open door was provided with a stout, metal hasp that was designed to fasten over a staple driven into the wood of the outer jamb.

In considering the possibilities, Raymond conceived a notion that he not only might escape from the menacing pistol, but, at the same time, rid himself of the private's unwelcome company. The opportunity was too good to lose, and thought and action were nearly simultaneous. A quick, backward leap carried him out of the sentry box, and, with the same movement, he seized the handle of the door, swung it on its hinges, and slammed it shut. With a sidewise twist of his hand he hooked the hasp over the locking staple, and the business was done.

Either Blodgett's nerve failed him, or else his wits were too slow in responding to the emergency. He had a fraction of a second to make up his mind to fire, and the chance was gone. The suddenness of the affair seemed to daze him for an instant; then, just too

late, he flung himself against the closed door. "Let me out!" he yelled, pounding in frenzied rage on the heavy, oak panels. "Open up, I say, or I'll shoot through the door!"

Raymond edged discreetly to one side, but kept his thumb on the closed hasp, while he cast about for a means of fastening it against the possibility of its jarring loose. In the absence of a padlock, he decided that his necktie was the best available substitute. This he managed to remove with his free hand, and, careful to keep himself beyond range of a chance bullet, he threaded the silk fabric through the projecting staple and knotted it tightly in place.

The door secured, he inspected the walls of the sentry box. The structure was built solidly of heavy planks, and, beside the barricaded doorway, a window in the rear was the only opening. This window, intended merely for purposes of ventilation, was little more than a loophole. It would not have admitted the body of a child.

Satisfied that his prisoner was safely confined, Raymond raised himself on tiptoe and ventured to look within. In the darkness his eyes were of little service, but his ears told him that Blodgett was not yet resigned to his lot. The man seemed to be practicing a series of flying leaps across the narrow confines of the patrol box, flinging himself bodily against the resisting door, and pausing between breaths to howl imprecations to the world at large.

Raymond listened grimly for a minute, and then attempted to interfere. "You might as well save your excitement," he called out sharply, and at the same time drawing his head away from the danger line. "There's no one near enough to hear you, and it's wasted effort trying to break through the door. The sentry on the next beat isn't due here until seven o'clock. By the time he arrives, it will be too late to help

you. Better sit down, Blodgett, and consider your troubles thoughtfully. I assure you they're serious."

The private postponed a fresh attack upon the door and moved back to the window. "Let me out of here!" he yelled, thrusting his face above the sill. "Open that door!"

Raymond laughed serenely in the darkness. "I intend to open it—presently. But first I'm going to row out to that yacht. I'll be back soon, though—long before the other sentry shows up. You may look for me some time within half an hour. You were foolish enough to force my hand, and now you've got to pay. When I come for you, I shall permit you to row me across the river to the nearest regular-army recruiting station. The sergeant in charge will take you off my hands and send you on your way to the place you're going, and no one about the Pol-lux Mills will ever know what happened to a certain Blodgett, sentry, who disappeared mysteriously one stormy evening from his post of duty."

Blodgett made a great effort of bravado. "You've got to get me first, you know," he said blusteringly.

"Yes, I was just going to speak of that," the lieutenant drawled smoothly. "When I come back I expect to find your revolver on the ground, underneath this window." He paused for an instant, and then a hard, metallic note crept into his voice. "I'm going in there after you, and if you happen to be armed when I do it, I'll take it for granted that you're looking for trouble. And you'll get it, straight from the hip—the instant I throw open the door!"

Having provided his prisoner with a subject of improving thought, Raymond turned, without further conversation, and hurried back along the beach toward the spot where he had left the rowboat. His estimate of the other's character led him to believe that he would find the revolver under the win-

dow when he returned to the sentry box. If by any chance the man should attempt to resist, however, the advantage of surprise this time would be in Raymond's favor, and he held little doubt as to the outcome of a struggle in the dark. The possible result of his proposed visit to the yacht was of more immediate consequence.

Dismissing Blodgett for the present, he was about to make his way down under the gloomy pier, when a sudden, dismaying thought abruptly arrested his steps. In his haste to get back to the river he had forgotten the telephone in the sentry box.

He swung around with a gasp of consternation and stared back across the dunes. His oversight was inexcusable. The private, of course, would try to communicate with the barracks, and, unless he were forestalled, Raymond probably would find an armed provost guard awaiting him when he rowed back from his intended visit to the yacht. However, Blodgett as yet could not have had time to get a connection, and the lieutenant decided there was still a chance to rectify his blunder. He responded instantly to the emergency.

The wires of the company's private exchange crossed the harbor front at this point, and were strung along the approach of the freight pier. A break anywhere in the line would serve Raymond's purpose. So, instead of wasting precious seconds in running back to the patrol station, he caught up the hatchet he had used on the rowboat, swung himself onto the dock, climbed the guard rail, and started to wreck the Pollux telephone system.

There were a half dozen or more wires in the circuit, and, lacking the time to discriminate, he adopted heroic measures and proceeded to cut them all. By employing the insulation pegs as chopping blocks, he managed to sever each metal strand with a single, slash-

ing blow. He wielded his hatchet ruthlessly, and in a few seconds the job was finished. Every telephone in the mills probably had been put out of commission, but it was not a moment to be overscrupulous. Blodgett's line of communication was cut, and the vital end accomplished. The other damage was a result of unfortunate necessity, and could not be helped.

Raymond dropped his hatchet and descended to the dock with a deep breath of relief. Before the company's repair crew could learn what had happened, and reach the water front in their search for the break, he hoped to have his prisoner safely out of the way. And if he succeeded in carrying out his plans, no one would ever know who had cut the wires. He smiled whimsically to himself as he started back underneath the pier. Blodgett, as the sentry on duty, would be held responsible for the damage, and, if he disappeared from his post, the telephone mystery would never be explained.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIGURE ON THE DECK.

WHILE Raymond felt that he dominated the situation at the moment, he was alive to the necessity for quick action. His estimate gave him thirty minutes at least in which he need have no fear of interruption. In this time he hoped to row out to the anchored yacht, investigate the business of the crew, and get back to shore before any curious interloper appeared on the scene.

He would have liked to take Blodgett with him and save himself the return trip, but, not knowing how he might be received on the vessel, he did not dare hamper himself with a prisoner, and was forced to defer his final reckoning with the guardsman. It was a reckless, double-ended game, played under the strictest time limit. He believed

he would be able to carry it through, but there must be no delays.

Stooping at the edge of the beach, he looked across the harbor. It was almost dark now, but a short distance beyond the channel entrance he still could make out a dim, indistinct shape that told him the position of the moored yacht. The vessel showed no light, the skipper for some reason apparently wishing to remain as inconspicuous as possible. Realizing that within a few minutes the yacht would be invisible in the darkness, Raymond mentally mapped the straightest course from shore, and proceeded to launch his skiff.

The encircling bar protected the inner harbor from the force of the storm, and at the outset the light rowboat was easily managed. Darkness shrouded his movements, and the tumult of wind and wave smothered the sound of his oars. He bent energetically to his work, and sent the little boat skimming across the harbor.

In a short while he gained the approach of the narrow inlet. It was difficult, in the deep gloom, to determine just where the bar ended and the open water began; and on this occasion he did not dare search out the channel with the aid of his flash lamp. He pulled forward gingerly, and, after several blind attempts, in which his skiff narrowly escaped grounding, he succeeded at last in finding the way through.

Once outside the harbor, new troubles confronted him. His course now was open and unobstructed, but he was exposed to the full force of the storm, and progress was dangerous and uncertain. Huge waves, breaking in across the end of the bar, set his boat dancing perilously, and at times even threatened to snatch the oars from his hands. But he threw his weight vigorously against the blades, and, by careful management, contrived to keep the skiff headed squarely into the wind as

he buffeted his way out across the tossing, black waters.

It was a strenuous pull, but, after the first dozen strokes, he lost any doubts he may have had as to his ability to handle the rowboat. The little craft rode the waves buoyantly, taking each breaking roller with a clean, smacking plunge, and Raymond saw that unless she was allowed to swing broadside into the trough there was no fear of capsizing. His problem merely was to hold the cleaving bow to the storm, and continue to drive ahead.

Fortunately the yacht was anchored in close to the harbor mouth, and although the oarsman's progress was laborious and slow, it did not take him a great while to fight his way across the intervening stretch of water. The hull of the unlighted power boat loomed out vaguely in the gloom, and, by glancing over his shoulder now and then, he was able to keep his direction. He pulled ahead, without thought of concealment, and at length found himself wallowing in the swell, not more than an oar's length from the stern of the other vessel.

For a fraction of an instant Raymond paused anxiously on his oars to listen. No one challenged him, and he guessed that his approach had not been observed. He calculated his chances quickly, and prepared to run alongside. To make sure of his skiff, he twisted the end of the painter through his fingers, ready to fasten to the yacht rail when he clambered aboard. Then, balancing himself to the pitch of his boat, he forced his way to the crest of the next oncoming wave, dipped into the hollow, and lifted again, directly under the stern of the yacht. With a lightning movement he shipped his oars and scrambled to his feet. He measured the distance in a flashing glance, and jumped.

He had timed the action to a split second. As he reached out in the dark-

ness, the rail of the yacht swung up to meet his hand, and, in another instant, he made good his hold and started to scramble aboard the larger vessel. He was just throwing his leg over the rail, when a great wave scooped down along the side of the yacht and caught the deserted skiff squarely abeam. There was a tremendous tug at the painter, and, before Raymond could brace himself against the pull of the wave, the taut line was jerked from his fingers and the rowboat went whirling back toward shore.

Raymond made a frantic grasp for the rope, and missed. The little skiff flung up on the top of the wave, danced briefly before his horrified eyes like a flitting shadow on the water, and was gone.

He stared shoreward in dismay as the full measure of his plight came home to him. His carefully laid plans ended ignobly with the loss of his boat. Blodgett would be liberated from the sentry box. His rescuers would listen to the lurid story of his wrongs, and Raymond would not dare to go back to the mills, even if he found a way to get there.

In the meantime he was marooned on an unknown yacht, with a crew of strangers who, he feared, would not receive him in any particular spirit of hospitality. He considered the situation for a moment, and then shrugged his shoulders and set his jaw. The mishap was unavoidable, and he would have to make the best of it. He was dry, at any rate, and safe from the waves. The future could look out for itself.

With this philosophic reflection he groped for the rail, and started to make his way forward along the unsteady deck. He had boarded the vessel without a sound, and the crew as yet seemed unaware of his presence. Anxious to avoid discovery until he had learned something about the yacht, he stole

along on tiptoe, his body swaying to the uneasy movements of the boat. As he neared the bow, he made out an indistinct shape standing in the lee of the little wheelhouse, and perceived that some member of the crew with the white umbrella was still on duty.

The silhouetted figure was small and slight, and, in spite of the protecting deck house, the cumbersome umbrella seemed difficult to manage. Raymond, watching in tense curiosity from the shadows, suddenly realized that the mysterious sentinel was a woman. In his astonishment he forgot caution as he stepped across the deck toward her. She turned with a start at the sound of his footfall, and, in the semidarkness, he recognized the delicate profile of Wilda Winston.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXPLANATIONS AND APOLOGIES.

RAYMOND still remained in the shadow of the wheelhouse, and the girl must have mistaken him in the gloom for some one who belonged aboard the yacht. She peered through the darkness in an effort to see him, but did not seem much disturbed by his unexpected appearance. "Why are you on deck?" she asked, after a pause. "Have you learned anything yet?"

"Not a thing," he answered, striving to hide the surprise he felt at finding her there; "but I certainly intend to."

His voice betrayed him. The girl straightened with a stifled cry of amazement, and faced him in evident alarm. "You!" she exclaimed, in a dry, gasping whisper. "How did you get aboard this boat? What are you doing here?"

Raymond laughed with assumed carelessness. "I saw you were having trouble with that umbrella in the wind, and rowed out to see if I could be of any assistance." He extended his hand as though to relieve her of the encum-

brance. "If you must stand out here in the storm, at least allow me to help you keep yourself sheltered."

The proposal was framed in a tone of innocent politeness, but the girl acted as if she suspected him of having criminal designs on her property. "No—no," she stammered, shrinking away from him. "It isn't at all necessary. I'm all right without your help, thank you."

Raymond, however, was not to be denied. "Really," he said, "you must permit me." He stepped to her side, and, in spite of her vehement protests, calmly relieved her of the umbrella. Then, while she stood by, indignant and helpless, he proceeded to seek the reason for her extraordinary behavior.

Save for its size, the umbrella, at first inspection, did not seem to differ from the thousands of others he had seen. The enormous, silk cover was stretched over ordinary metal ribs, that opened up in the usual manner from a steel shank. The handle was peculiar, however, as he found on further investigation. It was made of some hard, rubberlike composition, with a checkered grip for the use of two hands, and from the base extended a pair of fine, insulated wires. Stooping, he passed the wires between his fingers and perceived that they ran somewhere below, through a hole bored into the deck planking.

Raymond stood up with puckered brows and gazed thoughtfully into the night. The wires argued an electrical connection of some sort, and the insulated, steel shank of the umbrella meant—— He caught his breath, and swung abruptly to face the girl. "I've got it!" he exclaimed, in a tone of suppressed excitement. "Wireless, eh?"

"What—what do you mean?" she faltered.

He shook his head in rough impatience. "You know what I mean," he declared grimly. "You've got a radio outfit aboard, and are using the um-

brella ribs for antennæ, in the place of the usual equipment. I've heard it could be done, but never saw the experiment tried before." He laughed unpleasantly. "No wonder the police have never found what they were looking for. I'm afraid, Miss Winston, that you're a very clever woman."

There was a harsh note in his voice that conveyed his thoughts more clearly than the actual words he used. The girl caught his meaning, and bristled with quick resentment. "You've no right to talk to me that way," she returned sharply.

Raymond returned the umbrella to her waiting hands, and contemplated her silently in the gloom. As he watched the slim, motionless figure before him, the first thrill of his startling discovery somehow lost itself in the unreasoning anger he suddenly experienced at seeing her thus under the white umbrella. "Miss Winston," he said, a trifle unsteadily, "I have tried to deal fairly with you. I believed the story you told me last night. You said you were playing the game straight with me. I trusted you."

He passed with a bitter smile; then bent nearer and regarded her earnestly. "You've given me my cue, and I intend to act accordingly. I came aboard this yacht to find out what is going on here, and I do not propose to leave until I have learned the whole truth. So you may as well start in by telling me what messages you are sending out or receiving here this evening."

Knowing the girl's spirit, Raymond was prepared for a violent outburst of some sort, and was surprised at her unexpected display of self-control. She did not speak for several seconds, and, when she found her voice at last, she seemed hurt rather than angered. "You don't know how unjust you are," she said, in a tone so low that the words were barely audible above the

sound of the waves. "You jump too quickly at conclusions."

"I'm sorry if I've misjudged your position here," Raymond returned, with a trifle less severity. "But really, you must admit there is something queer looking about all this secret wireless business."

"That is true," Miss Winston answered quietly. "I can understand that. Nevertheless, you might have reserved your suspicions until you gave me a chance to explain. You should have had some consideration."

Raymond regarded her for a moment in dubious silence. "If I was too hasty," he said, at length, "I begin now by apologizing."

"And I, for my part, am ready to believe you're sorry for the way you spoke to me," she replied gravely. "So, if you please, I'll tell you why I'm here. I'm merely trying to help my uncle to clear himself of the wicked charges that have been brought against him."

"To help him?" asked Raymond, with a hint of incredulity. "How?"

"By trying to trace the real criminals—the men who have been sending the Marconi threats to President Thorpe. The best way to do this, it seemed, was to attempt to eavesdrop. Other messages are apt to be sent, and when we pick one up we hope in some way to be able to trace it back to its source."

Raymond smiled skeptically. "How will you do that?" he inquired.

"It's all my cousin's idea," she said, "and I'm not exactly certain about his further plans. I'm only the umbrella holder."

"Oh, yes, of course," Raymond returned casually. "But why not use a legitimate apparatus instead of depending on the ribs of an umbrella to catch the expected aërograms?"

"Because my cousin feared it might arouse suspicion if the police knew we

had a wireless equipment aboard. He experimented with the umbrella, and found it would serve just as well. So he seized upon the chance to carry out his plans secretly." The girl drew a deep breath, and in the dusk he saw her head droop suddenly. "You see the members of my family are under a cloud at present," she added plaintively, "and we have to be very careful how we act."

"The cousin you refer to is George Winston, isn't he?" the lieutenant inquired, after a pause. "He's aboard now, I suppose?"

"Yes," she answered. "He's back there, in the cabin, with a friend of his—a wireless operator. They're watching for any messages that might come along."

"Leaving you outside, to hold the umbrella," he observed dryly. "When did they first appoint you to the task?"

"This morning," the girl replied. "It takes one person to tend the motors, and another to look after the wireless instrument. So they had to have a third, to remain on deck."

"When I pointed out the umbrella to you from shore the other day, did you know then what your cousin was doing?"

"No," she answered; "I did not. I knew nothing until he took me into his confidence to-day."

"But your cousin has been cruising about with his umbrella before to-day. What was he doing on the other occasions?"

"Just what he is doing now. Trying to get a wireless clew that will lead him to the real conspirators."

Raymond nodded, and changed the subject. "Why did you anchor here this evening?"

"On account of the storm," she said. "It's easier to manage our instruments now that we don't have to give so much attention to the boat."

Raymond stood for a moment in re-

flective silence. There was something so artless in her explanation that he could not help feeling she was telling the truth exactly as she knew it. Whether or not she knew all of the truth, however, was another question. He eyed her keenly for a moment in an effort to read her face in the darkness; then, without another word, he turned and started back toward the stern of the vessel.

The girl apparently was taken aback by his sudden departure. "What do you intend to do now?" she called after him, in a nervous whisper.

"I want to look over your cousin's boat, and perhaps have a little talk with him," was the answer. He glanced over his shoulder as he spoke, and noticed that she had taken a step toward him, as though she were half inclined to follow. Evidently she thought better of the impulse, for she checked herself almost instantly and stayed in the shelter of the wheelhouse with her umbrella.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN INTERVAL OF DREAD.

LEAVING the girl to her thankless vigil, Raymond moved aft. He groped his way along the unsteady deck until he reached one of the cabin portholes. Here he paused momentarily and tried to see within. The lamps had not been lighted, but as he watched, a tiny, pale-bluish flame began to flicker and wink in the darkness, and he knew that some one was operating a wireless instrument. He fancied he caught a letter or two of the Morse code, but was not expert enough for that sort of reading, and, after a futile attempt to patch a word together, he gave up the task as hopeless.

He bent his ear to the porthole, and stood motionless for a while in the hope of catching a sound of conversation. Failing in this, he turned impatiently

and stumbled down the tiny companionway that led to the decked-over compartment below. He drew his flash lamp from his belt, hesitated an instant, and then flung open the door and stepped into the cabin.

The luminous ray of the lamp revealed the figures of two men who were bending over a table by the paneled bulkhead forward. Both turned in their chairs as the shaft of light struck them, and then scrambled to their feet and stared wildly at the intruder. One of them was a short, stocky, dark-featured youth, whom Raymond recognized as George Winston. The other, taller and considerably older than his companion, presumably was the wireless operator the girl had mentioned. They faced the lieutenant in dumb, open-mouthed astonishment, both of them seemingly stunned by the suddenness of the apparition.

Winston was the first to recover from the shock. With a furious cry he moved forward, snapped on one of the cabin lights, and hotly confronted the guardsman. "What are you doing here?" he demanded hoarsely. "How did you get on this boat? What do you want, anyhow?"

Raymond quietly returned the lamp to his belt and met the volley of questions with a conciliatory smile. "I saw you anchor here," he said, "and, being on sentry duty, I thought it my business to row out and see what you were doing."

"Oh, you did!" shouted the other truculently. "Well, you can turn around and paddle right back. This river's a public waterway, and whatever we happen to be doing on it is our own affair."

The lieutenant faced the man coolly. "I'll be ready to go back," he observed, "when you tell me this evening's wireless news."

Winston looked up with a start.

"Wireless news!" he exclaimed. "What are you driving at?"

"You know very well what I mean," returned Raymond sharply. "I see your Marconi installation there on the table. But I don't need that to tell me what you're doing. I've been watching your umbrella for a couple of days, and Miss Winston has just informed me as to its use. It's a very novel idea."

The yachtsman advanced a step and glared threateningly at Raymond. "Just what did she tell you?" he growled.

"Why, she merely said that you hoped to prove your father innocent of these powder outrages by running the real criminals to earth. You are trying to pick up any messages that are drifting around, I understand. That's correct, isn't it?"

"Yes," was the gruff reply. "That's what we're doing." Winston's upper lip curved unpleasantly. "There's no harm in that, is there?"

Raymond shook his head. "Not the least," he said, and glanced curiously at the radio equipment on the table. "Have any success with that thing?"

"It takes off anything that happens to come along, if that's any of your business," was the uncivil answer.

"You were using it just now, when I came in," observed the other. "Anything of importance taking place?"

"Well, yes; you might say there was." Winston gave a deep, raucous laugh. "We've just picked up another message from that blackmailing gang. They say they're going to blow up Dry House No. 4 at seven o'clock to-night."

Raymond gazed at the man in blank wonderment. "To-night—at seven!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure of this?"

"Yes," answered the other, with apparent indifference. "We overheard the threat not two minutes ago."

"And if I recall correctly, that house is right in the heart of the mills." The lieutenant regarded the other intently.

"Why, scores of lives will be endangered!"

Winston grinned cheerfully. "I guess they'll get them out of the way in time. They always do."

"I guess you'd better guess again!" returned the guardsman sharply. "You're going to hoist your anchor, my friend, and start for shore."

"You'd better start yourself, if that's the way you feel about it," the yachtsman suggested. "If you want to warn them, go back the way you came. You can't hurt my feelings."

"I can't go!" returned Raymond impatiently. "My boat was washed away."

Winston shrugged his shoulders. "Well, don't get so excited about it," he advised. "The message was sent to President Thorpe, and I guess they picked it up in the Pollux wireless tower. The warning will be telephoned to the mills in time, just as it has been done before. So it isn't up to us——"

"The telephone!" gasped Raymond, his eyes dilating with sudden horror. "They can't phone!" he cried hoarsely. "I've cut the wires!"

CHAPTER XX.

CALLING THE SHOW-DOWN.

INTO Raymond's mind there burst an appalling vision of disaster: of unsuspecting men working in the doomed mill houses; of the explosion, the flying debris, the blasting flame to follow, the burned, mangled forms of the injured and dead; of the aftermath of grief and horror; and a sick, giddy feeling came over him as he realized that he himself must bear the responsibility for the tragedy.

With the telephone circuit broken, there was no hope of word reaching the mills from President Thorpe's office. It was too late to send a messenger across the river, and there was no regular wireless station nearer than the

Pollux tower. Raymond knew that, as he alone was to blame for the danger, he also was the only person in a position to avert it. The thought somehow seemed to steady his nerves. He glanced at the clock on the bulkhead opposite, and saw he had only thirty minutes in which to act.

With outward calm he turned and faced the other occupants of the cabin. "One of you can go on deck and break out the anchor," he said. "The other will please remain here, to start the engine. We're going ashore."

Winston answered with a negative movement of his head. "We'd never find the harbor entrance in the dark," he hastened to explain. "If we struck the bar, the storm would pound us to pieces in five minutes. I'm sorry for those poor fellows back yonder, but we don't dare risk it."

"Nevertheless, we're going through." Raymond spoke in a soft, quiet voice. His lips almost were smiling, but there was a glitter in his eyes that should not have been overlooked. "We'll start at once."

"Oh, no, we won't!" returned the other sharply. "If we make the attempt, we'll drown ourselves, sure, and we wouldn't help the fellows in the mills, either." His jaw set stubbornly. "This yacht is going to stay just where she is."

Raymond's right arm dropped to his side; his fingers closed over the butt of his revolver, and the hammer came back with a double click as he jerked the weapon from its holster. He balanced the heavy firearm tentatively in his hand and watched the startled Winston through narrowing eyes. "Perhaps I can persuade you to change your mind," he drawled, with a dangerous inflection.

The yachtsman recoiled from the revolver, his face growing perceptibly whiter. His mouth opened, but, as he started to speak, a sudden slamming

of the companionway door interrupted his half-formed protest. Raymond heard a quick, light step in the doorway behind him, and guessed that the girl had deserted her post on the deck to find out what was happening in the cabin. He saw Winston attempt frantically to signal with his eyes, and knew that the man was appealing for help. But he did not shift his position or even glance over his shoulder. "That's you, Miss Winston, isn't it?" he inquired.

"What—what's happened?" asked a frightened voice behind him.

"We have just learned that a new explosion is threatened in the mills," he said. "The phone wires are down, and there is no way of warning the night shifts, unless we can manage to reach shore. It means many lives if we fail——"

"But we mustn't fail!" broke in the girl wildly. "Why are we waiting?"

Raymond laughed contemptuously. "Your cousin fears we'll be wrecked and drowned if we try to run through the channel. He values his personal safety above the lives of a few workmen, it seems. He prefers to stay anchored, he says."

There was a tense silence, and the lieutenant had a feeling that the girl was gazing over his shoulder toward her cousin. "George," she gasped, at last, "is this true? You—you're afraid to try to make shore?"

"It's insanity!" growled Winston, with a venomous glance at the guardsman. "I'd like to do what I can, but I'm not quite a fool. You don't want to get drowned, do you?"

"From what I've seen of Miss Winston, I believe she's willing to take that chance," Raymond cut in quietly. He addressed himself to the girl, without looking at her. "Am I right? You're not afraid, are you?"

"No," she answered promptly, and

a note of scorn crept into her voice. "The coward streak doesn't run entirely through my family, I'm happy to say." There was the briefest pause. "What do you want me to do?"

Raymond would have given a great deal to see her face at that instant, but he did not dare turn around. "Miss Winston," he said gently, "I'm counting on you now to stand by me to the finish. We'll take the boat in together. Can you steer?"

"Yes," she replied.

"You ought to know the location of the channel," he went on. "Do you think you can find it in the dark?"

"I can try," she said breathlessly.

Raymond nodded. "Listen, then: Find an ax, a hatchet, a knife—anything that will cut. Go to the bow and cut the anchor cable. When you've done this, get back to the wheelhouse before she begins to pitch too much. The instant we're free, I'll see that the engine starts. Hold straight in for shore and run as close as possible to the end of the pier. You won't be able to see much, but, just the same, you're going to pull us through. Do you understand?"

The girl moved to his side and lifted her glance tremulously. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Why, I told you," he answered hastily. "I'll see that the engine keeps working." He watched her intently. "Please remember," he added grimly, "that human lives are at stake. No matter what happens, you must not leave the wheel. You won't fail me?"

She looked first at the revolver in his hand, and then at the two silent, white-faced men who were standing backed against the cabin bulkhead. Her head bowed suddenly, and she turned away with a low, sobbing breath. "I'll not fail you," she said unsteadily. "Start the engine when you're ready." She left the cabin without another

word, and closed the door softly behind her.

The instant the girl was gone, Raymond advanced on the two men with leveled revolver. "Now," he said, "perhaps you don't know it, but I'm not bluffing. Personally I think more of a mill full of workmen than I do of you two. It's your lives now against the lives of a score of others. I've decided which it shall be. If you fellows make me the slightest trouble, I shall kill you without a qualm."

There was a quality in Raymond's speech that must have told the pair he meant exactly what he said. In spite of the imminent peril, however, Winston still demurred. "But this is outrageous!" he protested violently. "You're risking my boat and my life on the longest sort of a chance. You're taking a mighty high-handed course here."

"Yes," returned the officer, "that's just what I'm doing. And I've called the show-down. You've got to make up your mind awfully quick." He indicated a small door that led to the engine compartment amidships. "The two of you can go through there and start this boat, or, if you prefer, I'll do it myself. But before I touch the engine I'll make sure that there's no able-bodied man left aboard to interfere with me. So, if I were in your place, I'd decide to risk drowning." He laughed harshly. "That, at least, will give you a few minutes' grace."

Winston and his companion looked at each other furtively for an instant, and then, as though actuated by a common impulse, they turned and started through the doorway behind them. Raymond drew his flash lamp with his left hand, snapped on the light, and followed the silent pair into the next compartment. With the revolver still clutched in his hand, he took his station by the open door and waited while the others stooped sullenly over the

little engine. "I'll give you the word when we're ready," he observed. "In the meantime stay just where you are."

Footsteps were heard on the deck overhead, and a little later a muffled sound of chopping carried back to them from the bow. All at once, the quick, uneasy plunging of the yacht changed to a heavy, rolling motion, and Raymond knew that the vessel had parted company with her anchor and was drifting broadside in the trough of the waves. He braced himself against the unsteady bulkhead and waited, tense and alert, until he felt the girl turn over the wheel. "All right!" he cried suddenly to Winston. "Half speed ahead, and keep her going until I tell you to stop!"

The yachtsman flashed a frightened glance over his shoulder, and then leaned forward with compressed lips and began fumbling at the engine. He saw the time for trifling had passed, and responded obediently to the command. His hand twitched among the levers, there was a tiny gleam of flame, a sharp, sputtering sound as the spark caught, and the motor got to work with reassuring promptness. The propeller shaft turned, and the yacht started to buffet her way through the water.

She staggered forward on her beam ends for a minute, rocking at the mercy of wind and wave, but she gradually picked up headway, and the girl in the wheelhouse managed to swing the bow around. By degrees the vessel lost her sidewise pitch and forged ahead with a new motion that told Raymond they were running with the waves and riding in toward shore. He registered a mental prayer that Miss Winston might find the channel, and settled back to wait.

Winston and the wireless operator crouched down over the drumming engine with set muscles and faces that showed livid and drawn in the searching glare of the electric lamp. They

evidently expected the worst, and were ready to bolt for the deck at the first hint of disaster. Raymond saw what was in their minds, but he was nearest the doorway, and, if the vessel struck, he meant to get out of the cabin ahead of them. His plan was to go to the girl in the wheelhouse.

He had not stopped to analyze his feelings, but somehow he understood that he would try to save her. If need be, he was grimly prepared to shoot down two men for the sake of the workmen in the mills. He also was risking his own life to carry the warning. But he realized now, with an alarming sense of partiality and unfairness, that Miss Winston came before all the others. He knew he would not reach shore unless she were with him.

Although his mind was occupied with such disturbing thoughts, his perceptions were keyed to the highest pitch of alertness. The hissing rush of waves against the hull, the creaking of the wheel, the sputter of the driving engine, the least movement of the keel, each telegraphed its separate story to his keenly receptive brain. Without seeing, guided only by sound and sensation, he took account of every yard of their progress. Instinct told him when they neared the outer bar, even before his straining ears caught the pounding of the breakers. He lived through interminable seconds of suspense, listening fearfully, scarcely breathing. All at once it came—the sound he had dreaded.

It was no more than a whisper underfoot—a faint, dry, ripping sound, as if some one outside had torn a sheet of paper. A fraction of an instant later something bumped up softly against the keel. The vessel checked in her course, careened dizzily to the starboard, hovered uncertainly in a swirl of boiling water, and then slipped off the shoal as suddenly as she had climbed onto it, righted herself with a

cough and a grunt, and began to kick her way forward through the quieter water of the inner harbor.

They merely had nicked the end of the bar, and were off again before Raymond even had a chance to shift his position. He lifted his head with a heartfelt sigh of thankfulness, and grinned cheerfully at his two frightened companions. "Well," he observed smoothly, "she found the way——"

The sentence was not finished. There was a prodigious crash, a sound of splintering wood, and the yacht reeled backward as abruptly as though she had driven head on against a stone wall.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT DRY HOUSE NO. 4.

THE force of the impact sent Raymond sprawling through the doorway of the engine compartment to the floor of the cabin behind him. In throwing out his arms to save himself, his knuckles struck the doorframe on either side, and both revolver and flash light went spinning out of his hands. He was on his feet in a second, but did not stop to recover his lost property.

With the first shock of collision he knew what had happened. Clearing the dangerous shoal safely, the girl almost immediately afterward had blundered into the long freight pier. Not knowing what damage they had suffered, Raymond's single thought now was to help her gain the dock before the vessel backed away.

He went up the narrow companion-way in a bound, and sprinted for the wheelhouse. As he hastened forward, the beat of the engine died, and he knew that Winston had retained enough presence of mind to shut off the power. He heard a heavy trampling of feet as the two men followed him to the deck, but at the same instant he saw Miss Winston's figure in

the darkness, and promptly lost interest in the others.

The girl ran aft, to meet him. "Is —is everything all right below?" she whispered anxiously.

"Yes," he answered. "Your cousin decided to see things my way, so nothing happened."

The assurance seemed to satisfy her, and she started at once to explain about the wreck. "I couldn't see in the dark," she said excitedly. "We were farther in than I thought."

He caught her silently by the hand and hurried her forward to the bow. A glance convinced him that the boat had come to no serious grief. A part of the rail was torn away, and the deck planking was badly splintered. This, apparently, was the only damage. The vessel seemed to ride as buoyantly as ever, but as she was beginning to drift away from the pier, he felt it just as well to get the girl off while the chance remained. He gauged the intervening space of open water, and then helped her steady herself against the broken rail. "Jump!" he commanded.

Miss Winston measured the distance with a glance, and sprang lightly from the boat to the pierhead. He followed quickly, and set off for shore the instant his feet touched the dock. His companion caught up with him before he had taken a half dozen steps. "I—I'm going with you," she informed him breathlessly.

Raymond fancied there might be reasons why she would not choose to be left alone with her cousin just then, and assented with a smile. "Come on, then," he invited, without checking his pace. "I may need you."

Together they ran along the pier, dodged under the dangling ends of the broken telephone wires at its approach, and turned in across the dunes toward the nearest group of lighted mill houses beyond. They passed within a short distance of the sentry box where

Raymond had confined the luckless Blodgett, but he had no time then to visit his prisoner, and continued up the path without a pause. He did not address the girl again until they had crossed the freight tracks near the loading platforms. "You're probably more familiar with the plant than I am," he observed suddenly. He indicated a row of buildings that loomed to their right, close to the outer barriers. "Dry House No. 4 is over there, isn't it?"

"Yes," she answered; "it's almost at the end of the row."

As they neared their destination, Raymond saw that his memory had served him correctly. The threatened building was located in dangerous proximity to several of the active mill houses, and it needed little imagination to picture the extent of the catastrophe if the place blew up. The dry house itself was dark and deserted, but lights showed in the windows of all the other structures, and the busy hum and throb of machinery indicated that full crews of men were working out the long night shift. Raymond glanced doubtfully at his companion as they passed within the danger area. "Perhaps you'd better not go any farther," he began. "It's——"

He broke off his speech, halted abruptly, and stared through the darkness toward the gloomy drying house. His quick eye had caught a movement in the shadow of the building, and he made out something that very much resembled a crouching, human shape. As he watched, the figure started forward again, stole along furtively under the protecting wall, and passed around the corner of the deserted house.

Raymond reached behind him and clutched his companion's slender wrist. "Listen!" he whispered, with repressed emotion. "I'll have to ask you to warn the workmen. Find the foreman in the nearest house, tell him what you know,

and make him send messengers to the other buildings. They must all get out—at once!" He regarded her intently for an instant. "When you've seen the first man," he went on, "leave the neighborhood. Don't lose a second!"

"But what—what are you going to do?" she stammered.

"I've got to follow that man."

"No!" she protested unsteadily. "Please don't. You mustn't—please don't go near that dry house!"

He laughed a bit huskily. "Don't worry about me," he said. "Your danger is as great as mine. We've both got to take our chances." He turned away before she could offer any further objections. "Hurry, please," he called softly over his shoulder. "And get out of here as soon as possible."

Assured that the girl would carry out her part of the trust, Raymond gave his attention to his own affairs. The mysterious prowler had vanished behind the dry house, but the time was lacking for him to have gone very far. His intentions possibly were harmless, but the hour and the place were ill chosen for an expedition of stealth, and the fleeting glimpse he had caught of the skulking figure was more than enough to arouse the lieutenant's suspicions. He went forward cautiously, and a minute later stood under the wall of the silent building.

He glanced around the corner, but there was no one in sight. Satisfied, however, that the man must be somewhere in the vicinity, he stole onward through the shadows with the purpose of exploring the immediate premises. He came to the entrance of the dry house presently, and instinctively paused. To his surprise he found the heavy, iron-wrought door standing slightly ajar, and investigation showed him that the lock was broken.

Now, Raymond knew that within these four, tight, metal-sheathed walls several tons of highly explosive nitro

powder were stored away to dry. It is not a product to be left carelessly exposed. The door of such a building at all times is supposed to be kept shut and locked. When the door of a dry house is found open, it is time to seek the reason and seek it promptly. Raymond did not stop to wonder or speculate. He thrust his way across the threshold, and stepped into the building.

Smokeless powder is seasoned in a temperature of something like one hundred and five degrees Fahrenheit, and the lieutenant gasped for breath as the hot, pungent darkness closed down upon him. He stood with parted lips, and tried to see into the murk. In such absolute obscurity his eyes were quite useless, but, as he waited, listening, he heard a faint sound at the other end of the chamber. It might have been only the creaking of an overheated beam, yet something seemed to warn him otherwise.

With an unconscious movement he reached for his flash lamp, and his hand came away empty. He recalled that he had lost both light and revolver in Winston's cabin when the yacht struck. The loss might prove serious now; nevertheless, it was not a moment for self-accusation. He was unarmed, but he had no thought of allowing that misfortune to interfere with his present business.

With the decision to find out what had made the noise in the darkness, he groped his way forward among the powder cases. His first step was answered by a loud squeak of one of the floor planks underfoot. He halted abruptly, and, as he did so, a heavy tread sounded in front of him, and a bulky shape loomed out of the blackness and flung itself upon him.

Raymond had no chance to prepare himself for the assault, and, as a result, he found himself thrown violently backward, as the thing he met in

the dark tried to rush past him. Falling, he reached out a clutching hand to save himself, and felt his fingers lock into cloth and yielding flesh. In an instant he regained his balance, and, with a savage thrill, swung and grappled with the lurching, panting figure that strove furiously to break his tightening grasp.

"Let go!" grunted a hoarse voice in his ear. "Let go, or I'll kill you!"

Raymond did not answer. One of his hands had gathered up the slack of the man's jacket, and he recognized the familiar texture of service khaki. Wonderingly he slipped his arms downward, and found that his antagonist was equipped with a heavy, holstered belt, such as the guardsmen wore. In a flash he reached for the man's weapon, and perceived that he had been anticipated.

"Who are you?" Raymond demanded sharply, striving in vain to see the face he was pressing so tightly to his shoulder.

The stranger cursed in a muttered undertone, and fought to tear himself free. "I'll kill you!" he snarled again.

Although he was unable to see, Raymond knew that the man had his gun and was trying for a chance to use it. With a sudden movement he slid his hand down the arm he held pinioned under his, and his fingers closed over the barrel of the coveted weapon. He jerked it away with a quick wrench, but in doing so he was forced to slacken his grip on the stranger's collar. With a supreme effort the man tore himself loose, leaped nimbly backward, and darted out through the open doorway.

Raymond followed. Between two neighboring buildings he saw a scuttling figure making off into the gloom. The butt of the captured revolver settled comfortably into his hand, and he leveled the muzzle with the grim knowledge that he was a master of the

thing he was about to do. Even as he touched the trigger, an instinct told him that he would not miss, and he watched to see the hurrying figure drop. There was a sharp click as the hammer fell, but no answering spurt of flame. The cartridge had missed fire.

CHAPTER XXII.

WITHOUT REASON OR WARNING

ONE after the other Raymond deliberately tried the six cartridges in the gun, and each, in turn, failed to explode. By the time the hammer snapped against the last chamber of the cylinder load, the fugitive figure rounded the corner of the nearest mill house and disappeared.

With the useless revolver clutched in his hand, Raymond darted forward, in pursuit; but, as he turned past the entrance of the mill house, he blundered headlong into a group of excited workmen who had just started to file out of the building. He found himself halted for several precious seconds, and when, at length, he forced his way through the crowding line of men, the fleeing stranger was nowhere in sight.

He stared vainly about him for a moment, and then looked around disgustedly at the rank of deserting workmen. As he turned, he saw Miss Winston come out of the doorway, and he hastened to her side. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

"Yes. The foreman, luckily, has seen me around the plant, and was willing to take my word. He's already sent men to warn the other houses."

Raymond nodded his relief. "I think it still lacks some minutes to seven," he observed. "You have done very well, Miss Winston." His eyes turned back in the direction of the dry house. "However, it's possible there may be no explosion, after all," he added.

"What do you mean?" she inquired. "Have you learned anything more?"

"Nothing especial," he replied evasively. "Let's get back to the river, Miss Winston."

Ignoring the questions of the anxious workmen, Raymond thrust his way through the crowd, and he and the girl set out together to retrace their path across the dunes. He was still clinging to the captured revolver, and, as he walked along among the lighted mill houses, he examined the weapon curiously.

He had aimed point-blank at the dry-house fugitive, intending to stop the man if he could. In this act he merely had accepted the sterner responsibilities of his position as a guardsman. He was too good a soldier to falter in such a crisis. But as he looked back more calmly on the affair, he could not feel sorry that he had not succeeded in bringing down his proposed victim. Nevertheless it struck him as being a singular mischance that the revolver had failed him.

He "broke" the heavy weapon and extracted one of the cartridges. There was a dent in the primer where the falling hammer had struck, and he knew the fault was not with the revolver itself. As he inspected the cartridge more closely, he noticed that the bullet was not set in its case as tightly as it should have been. He twisted the lead in his fingers, and it came out with a tiny pop, like a cork from a bottle. The jerk inverted the unstoppered case, and some sort of a liquid substance spilled out and trickled down the front of his jacket.

Raymond halted with a little exclamation of surprise and sniffed at the empty shell. "That's mighty queer," he observed to himself.

"What's queer?" asked his companion, trying to see over his arm.

"This cartridge. It was in the revolver I took away from the man we saw prowling around the dry house. No wonder the gun missed fire."

"Took it away from him!" she cried. "You didn't tell me about that."

He laughed. "The fellow escaped, so the rest wasn't worth mentioning." Again he sniffed at the copper shell. "This stuff has a familiar odor, but I don't seem able to identify it. Anyhow, it didn't go off. I never heard of a liquid cartridge load, did you?"

"No, I never did," she said, evidently puzzled by his words. "I don't believe I understand what you're talking about."

Raymond threw away the empty case and dropped the revolver into his holster. "I'm not so sure that I understand myself," he told her, and abruptly changed the subject. "Come on, let's hurry. I've a sort of appointment with a man on the river front, and I'd rather not keep him waiting."

In the crowding events of the evening Raymond had not forgotten Private Blodgett. The moment of his reckoning with the imprisoned guardsman was long past due, and he was anxious now to settle up his business at the sentry box as quickly as possible. Having refused to go in for Corporal Clancy's wrist-watch habit, he was without means of knowing the hour, but he guessed that it was about seven o'clock, and realized that he had the narrowest margin of time before the sentry on the neighboring beat was scheduled to report at Blodgett's patrol station.

Without stopping to explain any of this to the girl, he left the tracks and the freight platforms and set onward across the dunes at such a pace that she had difficulty in keeping up with him. She followed in wondering silence, and was only a short distance behind when at length he reached the head of the last hummock of sand and started almost on a run down the river path toward the turning point of the beach patrol.

When the dim outlines of the sentry box showed in the darkness before him,

he checked his step and advanced with a trifle more caution. Treading softly, he moved around to the entrance. A glance told him that he might as well have saved himself the hasty trip. His necktie had been removed from the staple, and the door stood wide open. He entered the booth, and found it deserted.

Raymond left the place, frowning, and turned ruefully to look back across the silent dunes. The girl came up a second later, and, without his saying a word, she seemed instinctively to realize that something was wrong. "What is it?" she asked breathlessly. "What has happened?"

"My man got tired of waiting, that was all." His glance ranged moodily up and down the beach. "Wonder how long he's been gone?"

"And he promised to wait here for you?" she inquired innocently.

"No; he didn't exactly promise. But I thought he rather expected to wait." He smiled suddenly and shrugged his shoulders. "Well, it isn't so important as it was a half hour ago."

He felt that she was trying to see his face in the darkness. "There's something mysterious about your conversation to-night," she remarked. "What is it you're trying not to say?"

"Oh, nothing in particular," he answered equivocally. "If you don't mind, let's go down to the pier and see how your cousin's getting along. I hadn't finished my talk with him when we left."

He started off down the beach, and, after an instant's hesitation, the girl decided to go with him. A short walk carried them to the approach of the pier, and they groped their way out along the rail to the point where they had landed from the yacht. The boat was visible nowhere in the vicinity of the dock, and Raymond bent down in an effort to see across the harbor. He stood up after a moment and grinned.

"We're not popular," he observed. "None of our friends seem to have time to wait for us."

"You mean they're gone?" Miss Winston asked, in astonishment.

"They're certainly not in the harbor." Raymond gazed thoughtfully toward the bar and the seething breakers beyond. "Your cousin seems to have recovered his nerve in a wonderful manner. He must have wanted to leave pretty badly to tackle that channel in a damaged boat. What do you think?"

"I—I don't understand it at all," she said uneasily.

"I'm beginning to, though," he muttered to himself. He stood silent for an instant, and then drew a deep breath and started to make his way back to the beach. "We might as well return and face the music."

The girl quickly caught pace with him. She started to speak, but suddenly stopped, her half-articulated words breaking off in a cry of amazement. Raymond halted with equal abruptness and began slapping himself frantically on the chest. A hot glow of fire spread out under his hands, and, without reason or warning, the front of his jacket burst into flames.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BELATED INTRODUCTION.

RAYMOND stripped off the blazing jacket faster than he ever remembered performing a similar action. Before he realized fully what was taking place, the garment was on the dock and he was trampling the flames with his feet. The fire had not penetrated the closely woven cloth, and he found little difficulty in stamping it out. He picked up the coat gingerly, passed his hand over the warm fabric, and then sniffed the scorched spot curiously.

The girl came to his side with a hysterical laugh that seemed to struggle be-

tween wonder and amusement. "What was it?" she exclaimed. "I was watching you, and—and all at once you lit up like a torch. Were there matches in your coat?"

For a second Raymond did not answer. He was looking intently at the girl, but from his detached manner it was evident that his thoughts were elsewhere. She was forced to repeat her question before she could regain his attention. "Oh, I beg your pardon," he said, recalling himself with a start. "No, I have no matches—not even pockets to carry them in. That blaze had the appearance of spontaneous combustion. Didn't you think so?"

"I didn't know what to think," she replied. "It was the most amazing thing I ever saw."

"You've never known anything like that to happen before?" he inquired, with a peculiar inflection. "A paper or cloth—catching fire that way? In your uncle's laboratory, perhaps?"

"No," the girl answered. "Never." She was on the point of saying something further, but was interrupted suddenly by a sound of footsteps on the approach to the pier. Both turned with the same impulse, and saw three shadowy forms coming out from shore toward them. As they watched, a dazzling beam of light searched its way along the dock, and some one called out to them through the darkness. "That you, Raymond?" challenged the speaker.

The lieutenant recognized Sergeant McTighe's guttural voice, and answered without hesitation. The newcomers advanced, and, as they drew nearer, Raymond saw that one of the sergeant's companions was Private Blodgett. At the sight of Raymond, the renegade guardsman called out in malicious triumph: "Here's your man, sergeant. Ask him who cut the wires. Ask him about the explosions."

Raymond faced the other without

emotion. "How'd you get away, Blodgett?" he inquired blandly.

"The man on the other beat heard me, and let me out. And now I'm back, and I'm going to teach you that you can't get funny with me."

"Hold on; let's have a little more quiet here," interfered McTighe. He switched his light into Raymond's face, and eyed him sternly. "How about all this? Are you a regular-army lieutenant?"

Before Raymond could find his reply, a new factor entered the breach in the person of the sergeant's other companion. The third man stepped forward with a muffled exclamation and stared excitedly at the masquerading guardsman. "How did you get here?" he demanded threateningly. "And how did you get into our uniform?"

Raymond looked into the man's fat, scowling countenance, and his eyes opened in surprise. The newcomer was President Thorpe.

The lieutenant quickly regained his composure. He regarded the Pollux official with smiling unconcern. "How did you happen to come over here?" he asked, after a silence. "Did you hear that wireless threat a while ago?"

"Yes, I heard it!" Thorpe exploded angrily. "I tried to call the plant, and the phone wouldn't work. So I had to charter a tug and come over here in person." He glared menacingly at the guardsman. "Why were those wires cut? What are you doing here, anyhow? What do you know about these powder outrages? I want an explanation, and I want it now!"

Raymond met the cross-fire of questions with external calm. "As for the outrages you mention," he said, "the latest one seems to have been nipped in time. It's after seven now, and that dry house hasn't blown up. I don't believe it will, but, if the worst should happen, the workmen, fortunately, are safely out of the way."

"Who warned the workmen out?" asked Thorpe suspiciously.

"I did, or, rather—Miss Winston here warned them. You have her to thank."

The president looked sharply at the girl, as though he only at that instant recognized her. Before he could offer any comment, however, Raymond interrupted. "As for the explanations you demand," the lieutenant went on quietly, "you shall have them—confidentially. Will you allow me three minutes' private conversation on the other side of the pier?"

Thorpe seemed on the point of refusing, but suddenly changed his mind. First, however, he turned prudently to McTighe and Blodgett. "You two stay close by," he ordered. Then he beckoned to the lieutenant. "Now I'll listen to what you have to say, but you've got to be quick about it."

Raymond stepped to the sergeant's side. "May I borrow your light?" he asked, and coolly appropriated the lamp before the other had a chance to object. He crossed with Thorpe to the opposite side of the dock, unfastened the collar of his shirt, and brought forth a crumpled envelope that had been pinned inside the garment. "Here's a letter from the chief of the secret service at Washington," he observed. "It will tell you who I am and why I'm here."

The president read hastily through the inclosure, and his mouth opened in wonderment. "Why—why didn't you say so before?" he gasped.

"Because, until to-night, I wasn't just sure what man I could trust around here," was the pointed answer.

Thorpe spluttered angrily for an instant, and then came saner reflection, and he decided not to take offense. "But have you learned anything?" he asked eagerly. "Do you know how these explosions were brought about? Do you know who is guilty besides Winston?"

Raymond's expression hardened at the mention of the chemist's name. "I've learned a great many things since I've been here," he said coldly. "I know, for instance, about your stock deal with Winston, and I know why you're so willing to suspect him of crime. You've been trying to get the controlling interest in this plant, and you overreached yourself, Mr. Thorpe." He laughed harshly. "Those blackmailers asked you for five hundred thousand dollars. But I don't believe they ever expected to get it that way. Of course, they'd have accepted the money if you'd shelled out, but their game was really much deeper than that of mere extortion. They were playing to reduce the price of Pollux stock and buy in at the ebb, and then, when the explosions stopped, to ride to opulence on the rising tide of values."

Thorpe was too keenly interested just then to resent Raymond's unpleasant inferences. "The stock has dropped frightfully," he admitted. "And I have just learned to-day that mysterious parties have been secretly buying outside holdings at the reduced prices. You mean to say they're members of the gang?"

Raymond shook his head. "No. It happens that they're not. They're merely a company of individuals who have a more altruistic feeling for their government than you have ever shown. Last night, after Winston's arrest, I received a letter that told me what was going on. Thanks to the reduction in the price of the Pollux stock, these men have succeeded in buying a controlling interest in your company. They have sent word to Washington that they are willing to manufacture powder exclusively for their own country—and at a fair and reasonable profit, Mr. Thorpe." He breathed deeply with satisfaction. "The so-called blackmailers did not move quickly enough. They have lost out, sir, and so have you."

"But—but you can't—are you sure of all this?" Thorpe faltered.

"Positive," answered Raymond. "You'll learn it all for yourself by to-morrow." He watched the man with a pleasant smile. "In the meanwhile I have two requests to make of you—no, three. In the first place, I wish you'd order Sergeant McTighe to keep his eye on that guardsman who is with him—Blodgett. I don't want him to leave the plant. My second request is that you'll arrange an interview for me with Mr. Winston. Have him in your office, say at nine to-morrow morning."

Thorpe regarded the lieutenant curiously. "So Winston is guilty, eh?"

"I didn't say so," was the curt answer. "My third request concerns the ten thousand dollars you have offered for the apprehension of these incendiaries. Out of that sum I want you to deduct enough to pay for the repair work on these telephone wires and to reimburse you for one of the company's rowboats I lost to-night on the river. The rest I wish you would use to start a pension fund for the widows and orphans of workmen who lose their lives in the mills."

The president raised his head indignantly. "What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"The reward," returned Raymond suavely. "Ten thousand dollars! I have earned it. After I have talked with Winston to-morrow, I'll tell you exactly how these outrages were committed. Furthermore, I'll produce the guilty parties. And in the meantime I don't think you need worry about there being any more explosions."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DRAWING THE NET.

IT was shortly after nine o'clock next morning when Raymond passed the scowling attendant in the reception room of the Pollux offices and entered

President Thorpe's private office. Winston, his niece, a detective from police headquarters, and Thorpe were awaiting him. As he stepped into the room, he carefully folded a newspaper he had been reading on his way across the river, and thrust it into the front of his jacket. He greeted the girl with a quick, friendly smile, and then nodded more soberly to the others.

"I asked you to meet me here," he said, after a pause, "to clear up the mystery of these recent mill outrages." His glance shifted to the chemist, and a look of compassion came into his eyes as he noticed the worn, haggard lines in the man's face. But there was no hint of feeling in his voice when he spoke again. "Why were you on the river the night we arrested you, Mr. Winston?" he asked abruptly.

The chemist raised his head wearily. "I've explained that to the police a score of times," he said, in discouraged protest. "Must we have the inquisition all over again?"

"I'm afraid we must. Especially as you have refrained from telling anything we wanted to know. However, I'll spare you needless questions. As long as you refuse to give us the truth, I shall tell it myself." He turned to the girl. "By persisting in his silence, your uncle has almost succeeded in making out a case against himself," he went on. "Nevertheless, he is innocent of the charges against him."

Miss Winston raised her eyes indignantly. "I don't need your assurance for that. Of course he's innocent."

"Others may not have had your faith in him, though," Raymond reminded her. "I for one mistrusted him up until the very night of his arrest. After that I had my doubts, but now I know that he had nothing to do with these explosions."

"How do you happen to be so sure of this?" inquired Thorpe sharply, and

his manner suggested that he, at least, would not be easily convinced.

"I got my first clew from those bundles of counterfeit money," returned Raymond. "It was one of your guardsmen, not Winston, who tampered with them that evening on the river."

Thorpe stared incredulously. "What proof have you?"

"It's very simple. The packages were intact when they were stowed away in the barge. I made it a point to be certain of that. Later, when we went aboard, we found they had been opened. Somebody had been investigating to see whether or not the money was bogus. No one could have done this at any moment during the trip down the river. We had the lantern wedged into the hatch, and were following very closely behind. It would have been impossible for any one to have gone down into that hold without being seen. The answer, then, is obvious. The bundles must have been opened after they were carried aboard and before the hatch was closed. The only persons who had an opportunity to do this were the guardsmen who took part in the expedition."

In spite of himself, Thorpe seemed impressed by the logic of the lieutenant's reasoning. "That all may be true," he confessed, "but you found Winston hiding alongside the barge. What was he doing there?"

Raymond shot a glance at the stubbornly set face of the chemist. "Perhaps we can persuade Mr. Winston to explain that himself, later," he observed. "It's enough for the present, however, to know that he had no interest in the blackmail cargo. My reasons for acquitting him are these: Had he been a member of the gang, he would have known that the stuff in the hold was to be inspected before the barge left shore. He would have been forewarned that the guardsmen were to follow the old hulk down the river.

Also, presumably, his comrade would have found a means to signal him that the extortion money was phony. In which circumstances, had he been in the plot, he would have avoided that barge as if she were a floating plague."

"That all may be true enough," agreed Thorpe. "A guardsman, as you say, probably opened the packages. But that doesn't prove that he was a member of any gang. He might have acted through nothing more than idle curiosity."

"I had thought of that, of course," said Raymond. "I might have been willing to give this unidentified guardsman the benefit of such a doubt, had it not been for the fact that my first suspicions were clinched by a later discovery. It was a member of your mill forces, Mr. Thorpe, who tried to blow up Dry House No. 4 last evening. He would have succeeded if I hadn't arrived at the critical moment. You'll find that the guardsman I encountered last night in the darkness is the man who tampered with those fake-money packages, who likewise had a hand in sending you the wireless threats, and who is responsible for all the recent outrages in the mills."

"You know how these explosions were brought about?" demanded Thorpe tensely.

For answer Raymond drew the revolver he had captured from the dry-house prowler, "broke" it, and extracted one of the shells. "Here is your answer. Our mystery is contained here, in this cartridge. Instead of the usual gunpowder, this shell is charged with a fluid combination of sulphide and phosphorus." He turned quietly to Winston. "I suppose you know what would happen if I were to uncork this shell and pour the liquid on Mr. Thorpe's blotting pad?"

Winston nodded. "Naturally," he observed dryly.

"Any high-school student in chem-

istry would know," Raymond went on. "This stuff is highly combustible. In its process of evaporation it would take fire spontaneously within a few minutes from its first exposure to the air." He swept the group with a quick, smiling glance. "So our frightful long-distance igniter has dwindled to nothing more than this simple little shell."

"It was not a bad idea," he continued thoughtfully. "Any igniter that showed a spark of flame could not have served the purpose of our criminal guardsman. Besides, he had no pockets to carry fuses or matches, and, furthermore, he was subject to search at any time. But by using the cartridges in his service revolver as vials to hold this devilish compound, he was enabled to carry out his plans without the least fear of detection. His methods were ingenious, but as simple as A B C.

"First came the wireless threat, that was picked up in the Pollux tower," Raymond went on. "The word of danger was at once telephoned across the river, to the barracks, and the guard was turned out and hustled to the point of menace on the double-quick. The men were ordered to search the dry house or the powder trucks or whatever was destined to explode. Our man was one of this search party, and, of course, was not slow to accept his opportunity. He may have carried an awl, to punch a hole in the powder cases, or possibly he always succeeded in finding a crack, through which the liquid might be poured. At any rate, he managed to reach the powder. After he had poured the fluid, all he had to do was sit back comfortably and wait for the explosion to take place. And, knowing the period of evaporation, he could time the affair almost to the minute."

He quietly returned the cartridge to its chamber, and thrust the revolver back into his holster. "Last night,"

he added, after the briefest pause, "the phone wires were cut, and the warning could not be sent to barracks. The incendiary, of course, had previously conferred with his accomplices, and knew the explosion was set for seven o'clock. He waited as long as he could, but finding, at last, that for some reason the guard was not to be turned out, he set forth alone to blow up the dry house. Naturally he wanted to create an impression of infallibility for his advertised instrument of destruction, and meant that each threat should be followed by the promised explosion. Fortunately I was able to block his plans. I got his revolver and cartridges, but the man himself escaped."

The city detective for the first time pushed himself into the conversation. "And you didn't recognize him?" he inquired anxiously.

Raymond shook his head. "He was a guardsman, but I am unable to say which one."

"Then how are we going to find him?" interrupted Thorpe. "Of all the guards in the plant, it will be impossible to pick out the one——"

"I shall identify him, nevertheless," observed the lieutenant quietly. "But you'll have to help me."

"How? I don't understand."

"I want you to order the entire guard assembled in—well, say in Mr. Winston's laboratory. You'll have to frame some sort of a pretext. When they're all gathered there, have the door locked from the outside. Then surround the building with a squad of city police. The first guard who breaks his way out of the laboratory—grab him! He'll be the guilty man!"

Thorpe stared at Raymond as if he feared he had taken leave of his senses. "You mean you expect to identify the criminal, and chase him out of doors and——"

The lieutenant laughed. "Exactly. First, however, I want you to have a

factory lot of powder sent to the laboratory. Leave it lying around in open cases, as if it were just undergoing chemical tests."

"But a factory lot!" exclaimed the bewildered Thorpe. "Why, that's half a ton!"

Raymond nodded serenely. "Yes, I'll need about that much to smoke out our man." He left the president to consuming curiosity, and turned suddenly to Winston. "And now that we've settled for the man whom I assume to be the chief conspirator," he observed, in an altered tone, "we'll speak of his accomplices. Mr. Winston, why did your son use an umbrella with the wireless outfit he has aboard his yacht?"

The question was unexpected, and the chemist was taken off his guard. His eyes grew wide and staring, he caught a deep, gasping breath, and his hands clutched convulsively at the arms of his chair. "What—what are you talking about?" he said, in a faltering undertone.

Raymond faced the other relentlessly. "You suspected your son, didn't you, Mr. Winston? You knew that he was angered by your losing stock deal with Mr. Thorpe. You understood that he might have a motive for leaguely himself with criminals. You knew that your own dynamite experiments might have suggested the idea for this blackmailing scheme. You learned that your son was making mysterious trips on the river. This is all true, isn't it?"

Winston made a desperate effort to regain his self-possession. "I don't know what you're driving at," he answered unsteadily.

Raymond shook his head gravely. "There's no need for you to try to shield your son any longer. I have absolute proof that he is a member of this gang. There are three of them, Mr. Winston: Your son, a wireless operator, and this unknown guardsman

in the mills." He watched the expression of the chemist's piteously drawn features, and a gentler note came into his voice. "You may as well tell the truth, sir. Although your son is guilty, he will never be prosecuted."

Winston raised his head slowly. "What do you know?" he asked, with a tired sigh.

"Everything." Raymond paused for an instant as if to allow that comprehensive statement to sink into the chemist's intelligence. "About this wireless outfit," he pursued—"did you know your son had it aboard his yacht?"

Winston evidently perceived the futility of further denial. He nodded. "I—I suspected it," he admitted.

"And, believing your son was mixed in this affair, you tried to save him. You had learned that evening that the Pollux company had decided to answer the extortion threats by sending a loaded barge down the river. You knew your son was cruising somewhere on the stream. You rowed out to wait for this barge, intending to drift down with it in the hope that you might catch him red-handed when he came aboard for the money packages. That's why you were hiding alongside the flatboat when we caught you there. Am I correct, Mr. Winston?"

"Yes, that—that was my motive," said the chemist, in a choking voice.

"I was aboard your son's boat last night," the lieutenant went on, in an even tone. "I then first learned the purpose of the white umbrella I had seen so often. Your son was using his wireless instruments even as I surprised him in his cabin. He explained to me that he was trying to trace the source of the blackmailing messages; that he was attempting to run down the real criminals in order to prove your innocence."

Winston stiffened in his chair. "To prove my innocence?" he cried.

"That was his story," answered Ray-

mond. "He apprised me then of a threat to blow up Dry House No. 4. That much of his story was founded on fact. But he said he had picked up the message from some one else's instrument. He was not telling the truth. I happened to look in through the port before I entered the cabin. I saw then that the two men were using their wireless equipment; but the operator was not receiving, as I was so carefully given to understand. He was *sending*."

Winston looked up in dull misery. "Everything appears very black, but ——" He checked himself, and an expression of wistful appeal came into his eyes. "I have been more than frank with you; I hope you'll be as lenient as possible in your dealings with my son. You—you said something about there being no prosecution——"

Raymond regarded the man pityingly for an instant, and then slowly raised his hand and brought forth the newspaper he had tucked into his jacket when he entered the office. He unfolded the sheet and glanced briefly at a headline on the first page and a news story underneath—a story which mentioned the wreck of a storm-tossed yacht called the *Wilda* on a reef twenty-five miles farther down the river, and the drowning of the two young men who comprised her crew.

He spread out the paper gently and laid it on the table in front of Winston. Then he beckoned to the others, and softly withdrew from the office.

CHAPTER XXV.

SMOKING HIM OUT.

THE guardsmen who assembled that morning in response to Thorpe's summons were a deeply mystified crowd. They all had grown accustomed to emergency calls during the last few days, but on every other occasion their duties were outlined and

some reason assigned for the expedition. Now, however, no explanation accompanied the summary command. The order was merely to report at once in the chemical laboratory, and nothing more. Even Captain Scott, who received the curt message from the president and conducted his company from barracks, seemed as much in the dark as any of the others.

Raymond originally intended to bring together only the men who had taken part in loading the barge. But, on second thoughts, he decided it wiser to include the entire force. If there were any discrimination, the guilty man might become suspicious, and, besides, it was possible that more than one member of the company was involved in the conspiracy. So none was missing when Scott solemnly led his command across the mill grounds to the laboratory building.

For the last time Raymond wore the uniform of a private and marched forth in the ranks with his comrades. He was one of the first to enter the chemical laboratory, and he drew a little to one side to watch the others as they straggled in past him. He already was acquainted with a number of the company, and he watched the men's faces curiously as the long, military line moved in through the open doorway and crowded across the room.

Sergeant McTighe was present, silent, saturnine, ready to obey any order that might come, no matter what it happened to be. And the irrepressible Clancy, laughing, incessantly chatting, his face alive with interest. Also Captain Scott, who, without knowing what was expected of him, contrived, however, to show that he felt the great importance of the occasion.

Blodgett was almost the last guardsmen to pass into the laboratory. Although he had not heard whether the private had made any effort to leave the plant during the night, Raymond,

nevertheless, was inclined to suspect that the man's presence here this morning was a mute tribute to the vigilance of Sergeant McTighe.

Blodgett found the lieutenant's searching glance upon him as he entered, and he flushed suddenly, scowled, and hastily averted his eyes. It evidently was a shock to see his former officer still an accredited member of the guard, but at that moment he was too visibly alarmed for his own safety to venture to ask questions. He retired sullenly to a corner of the room, and took but little part in the subsequent proceedings.

As soon as the last member of the company had filed into the laboratory, Raymond turned and stealthily shut the door. An instant later he heard the click of a key shooting the lock from without, and he smiled grimly to himself. The windows now remained the only means of exit, and a man does not leave a place by a window unless he has definite and urgent reasons for so doing.

Stacked in the middle of the room, with the covers removed and the contents carelessly exposed, were a half dozen or more cases of gunpowder. President Thorpe had fulfilled his part of the contract conscientiously. There was easily a thousand pounds of high explosives in the lot, and the guardsmen were crowding over the boxes with voluble curiosity.

"What kind of a game is this, anyhow?" Clancy was heard asking, as Raymond pushed his way in among his comrades. "Why there's enough of the stuff here to spread this building out over the next three States! What's the idea? Do they want us to sit on it to keep it from blowing up, or what?"

"It wouldn't surprise me if some sort of trouble was expected around this laboratory," Raymond cut in genially. "Some peculiar things have happened in the plant within the last few hours,

and I imagine Thorpe is looking out for surprises."

"Peculiar?" demanded one of the guardsmen. "What do you mean?"

"Why, for instance, I had a rather odd experience myself last night," observed the lieutenant. "I caught a man prowling around one of the dry houses, and had a fight with him in the darkness. The man got away, but I managed to capture his revolver." He raised his voice deliberately, and, as he started to relate his experience, he was conscious that every eye in the room had turned in his direction. "There was something singular about that gun—or, rather, the cartridges in it," he went on. "They were loaded with water, or something of the sort."

Raymond paused for an instant to satisfy himself that he held the full attention of his auditors, and then proceeded to take the revolver from his holster. "This is the gun," he said. He opened the chamber and extracted one of the cartridges. "Here, you can see for yourselves." With a quick movement of his fingers he drew the leaden stopper from the shell. "See—it holds a liquid——" As he spoke, the shell suddenly slipped from his fingers and dropped into one of the cases at his feet, its fluid contents trickling among the yellow grains of powder.

As the cartridge fell, Raymond fancied he heard one of the group draw a low, gasping breath, but the men were crowding so densely about him that he was unable to single out the one whom the mishap seemed to affect. He glanced around sharply, and then stooped and picked up the empty shell. "You saw for yourselves," he said, with a laugh, as he dropped the revolver back into its holster. "Liquid instead of powder. Queer, isn't it?"

The majority of the guardsmen were not especially impressed by their comrade's discovery, and after a moment or two the conversation began to lan-

guish. The group surrounding the powder cases gradually broke up, and the men began to move restlessly about the laboratory. Raymond withdrew alone to a dim corner, and waited grimly to see what would happen. By experiment he knew that the phosphorous compound was due to act within a few minutes after its exposure to the air, and assuming that another person in the room was familiar with its dangerous properties, he felt that he would not be kept very long in suspense.

Several times during the anxious interval that followed some guardsman stopped casually to try the doorknob. Raymond heard them complaining to each other about the indignity of their being locked in, but it seemed to occur to none of them to attempt to force his way out of the place.

The minutes dragged interminably. The lieutenant found himself surveying the faces about him with growing apprehension. With slightly quickened breathing he was just starting to move out of his corner, when suddenly the expected happened.

There was a clatter of feet across the floor, the rattle of a window violently upflung in its casement, and he caught a fleeting glimpse of a brown-clad figure that vaulted out over the sill and fled wildly from the laboratory. He ran to the window just in time to see two uniformed policemen rise up from behind a neighboring dune and grapple with the deserting guardsman. In the frantic struggle that followed, the fugitive's head was twisted around, and the lieutenant found himself staring into the savagely distorted features of Captain Scott.

With a thrill of excitement, Raymond forced his way back to the door. He rapped three times quickly, and almost instantly the key turned in the lock. Flinging open the door, he stepped out into the corridor where

Thorpe and Miss Winston were awaiting him.

"The police have got your man outside!" he said tensely to the president. "I didn't think he'd have the nerve to stick it out. And I can't say that I blame him. I'd be running myself if I didn't know that water had been substituted for the phosphorous stuff in that shell."

"Who's the man?" exclaimed the president.

Raymond laughed. "Your trusted commandant, Captain Scott." He nodded toward the outer doorway. "Go see that the police put him through the third degree. He's a bit shaken now, and you'll get a confession sure if you strike at once."

He turned with a smile to the girl as the president started hastily from the building. "And I guess that about finishes up the job," he observed. "I was sent here to find a long-distance igniter, but, thank Heaven, such a diabolical instrument does not exist. So my work is ended. I'm returning to Washington to-night."

"Yes?" she said, under her breath, and would not look at him.

Raymond moved a pace nearer. "I received word just this morning that the government has decided to place a large munitions order with the newly organized Pollux company," he said, in a lower voice. "They have asked me to return here a little later and keep an eye out for Uncle Sam's interests. Would you accept?"

"Why—why, you know what is best for you," Miss Winston answered unsteadily.

"I do know what is best for me." Raymond watched her face with a softening glance. "I've already wired my acceptance. As soon as I've settled my affairs in Washington, I'm coming back to Powdertown."

THE END.

How They Could Know Him

A WILD-EYED, disheveled-looking woman burst into the local police station. "My husband has been threatening to drown himself for some time," she cried hysterically; "and he's been missing now for two days. I want you to have the river dragged."

"Anything peculiar about him by which he can be recognized, supposing we find a body?" inquired the officer.

The woman hesitated, and seemed at a loss for a minute or two. Then a look of relief slowly overspread her face. "Why, yes," she exclaimed at last; "he's deaf!"

Cause for Amusement

MR. WEEDON GROSSMITH, the popular English comedian, tells a story of one of his early efforts to entertain.

A friend of his, Mr. Walter Webb, who had a house in the country, had fitted up a large barn as a sort of theater, and every now and then he gave entertainments there, to which the neighboring rustics were invited. On one occasion, Mr. Grossmith went down to give an entertainment.

"The laughter was so great when I was on the stage," Mr. Grossmith said, "that I became greatly embarrassed, as I could scarcely account for it. The laughter became so great that at last Mr. Webb rose and addressed the audience.

"I know," he said, "how difficult it is to restrain our mirth when Mr. Grossmith is on the stage, but if we don't check our laughter the performance won't be over till midnight."

"A burly farmer replied: 'Excuse me, Muster Webb, it bain't Mr. Grossmith we be laughin' at, but some one have left the barn door open, an' all the pigs have got in, an' they be nigh pushin' of us off our seats!'"

—A Tale of Swimming—
The Trudgeon Stroke—



By Olin L. Lyman.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

STRIKING A BARGAIN.

BLOND, upstanding, clear-eyed, confident with the confidence of twenty-three years, Andy Leffen streamed down toward the Grand Central Station, suit case in hand. He paused a moment by a window wherein was displayed a flashy lithograph: A modern Undine, with wonderful hair, disported in the surf with an overhand stroke.

"Me for two weeks of that sport," he reflected. "Wish I could get the trudgeon stroke!"

He slept that night in a Pullman that, with others, went kiting up the Hudson. Sunday morning he descended from the train at a station near Oswego. At the platform waited the stage which would take him to Roseville-on-Ontario. He was the only

passenger. He would have enjoyed riding with the driver, but he wasn't invited. The jehu looked like a man who loved to herd with his own troubles. So Leffen, with a pipe between his teeth, rode inside, while the coach and two plowed through a sandy road.

The scenery was certainly thickening. The peace of green places permeated Leffen's soul. The sweet song of birds dimpled what otherwise would have been sylvan silence. These scenes were all that poets and realty speculators had claimed.

They arrived at "Breezeblown," a rough-and-ready structure. A burst of feminine laughter sounded around a corner of the wide veranda. That suited Leffen. In the office he found the lank, gray landlord, with a set smile like an ambulance lawyer's, a mild business air, and shirt sleeves.

Leffen registered. "Is my room ready?" he asked.

Elihu Jenkins looked perplexed. "When did you write for a room?"

"Three weeks ago; a ten-dollar room and board, two weeks."

Jenkins thought a moment, knitting his brows. "I've got two big front rooms, double size, with private baths into 'em. I'll put you in one of 'em. You'll like it better'n the little room."

Andy Leffen had been born and reared in New York City. He knew what every Manhattanite learns early: that in this vale of tariffs and of tears, about the only man who gets something for nothing is the man whom the police sometimes nab. Now his thoughts flashed to a vexing problem of scanty resources buttoned in his hip pocket.

"What's your rate for this bigger room?" he inquired.

"Regular rate's ten a week for room and board. Rate with one of them bigger rooms is sixteen a week."

Leffen didn't trouble to make a mental inventory of resources. The visible margin was too narrow to require it. At a salary of fifteen dollars per week a sinking fund is mostly sunk. He fronted the horn of an unexpected dilemma. Candid by nature and by necessity, he threw his cards upon the table while he grinned ruefully.

"Look here, Mr. Jenkins," he said, "I simply can't afford a sixteen-dollar rate. Your ad read 'from ten dollars up.' I wrote you on that basis."

Jenkin's set smile faded to a shadow. "Well, now," he urged mildly, "a trifle like six a week ain't much to you city fellers."

"Isn't it, though?" sadly replied Andy. "Say, a lot of us have to start at that, and by the time we're fifty we're back to it again. The dead line is getting younger every year. I had to come up here on a slim margin. I had to protect my preferred steel stock, you see. Now it's your mistake, all right. You ought to have let me know. Give

me the sixteen room at ten till you can shift me into a smaller one."

Jenkins uneasily shifted a suspender. "No, Mr. Leffen, I can't do that. There ain't goin' to be no smaller ones. I'm full for a month up, an' I'm liable to rent them two big rooms before sundown."

Leffen reached for his suit case. "Well," he remarked dejectedly, "I'm sorry, but I can't stand that rate. To be perfectly frank, I couldn't buy a postage stamp for a letter home on the surplus. I guess I'll have to find a room somewhere else, or go back."

Jenkins had been pondering. Now he looked up suddenly. "Say," he asked, "can you swim?"

Leffen's wits were keen. He saw that the landlord's sudden question meant something, so he replied:

"Swim? Why, say, if I missed the last liner over, I wouldn't have to worry. The good old side stroke would get me across in time."

"Fine!" The landlord beamed. "Well, now, how'd you like to be a life-saver?"

"A life-saver?" echoed Leffen blankly.

"Uh, huh! You see it's this way: The place is full o' girls—party of 'em from down New-York way. Got here day before yesterday. They're all crazy about the water, but only two or three of 'em can swim, an' them only a few strokes. Ain't only a couple o' fellers here now, an' they can't swim much, neither. Girls has been after me tellin' I'd ought to get a life-saver, that'd be there to protect 'em if they should let go of the rope, an' learn 'em to swim some, besides. An' I want every one satisfied, so I've been kind o' promisin' I'd get one, without actually saying so."

"I see." Leffen grinned. "You want to spring me as the new life-saver for Breezeblown, from New York."

"Exactly, if we can hit it off. I know I've made some mistake about your room, an' I feel guilty about it. Now,

supposin' we make it up, fair an' square. I tell 'em you're the finest life-saver ever yanked a screechin' little lady out of the surf. An' you'll learn 'em to swim, say for an hour or two in the afternoon. You'd enjoy it all; they're a scrumptious-lookin' set of girls. You wouldn't have much to do. And I let you have table board at six a week and give you that big room free. How about it?"

"Say," exclaimed Leffen, "we're both in luck! Here's where dull care is expelled from its last line of trenches. Get out your megaphone and tell 'em I'm Duke Kakkiana, or whoever he is, the South Sea serpent, in disguise. And tell the girls I'll make Kellermanns of 'em. When do you want me to start in?"

"Well, the girls'll be goin' in before lunch. I expect some of 'em'll be dressin' for the water now."

"Show me my room. I've got my bathing suit with me, and I'll get ready now. Is there any place a fellow could take some of the girls around and spend a little money on them?"

"The bunch is goin' to take the stage over to Hallowell Tuesday afternoon. The village fire department and police has a blow-out."

"I'll be with 'em!" chortled Leffen. Picking up his suit case, he followed Jenkins upstairs to a room that was really roomy.

Descending the stairs, Jenkins smiled a shrewd smile. "He's satisfied, an' I ought to be," he said to himself. "I'll advertise in the *Oswego Palladium* that there's a real life-saver here."

CHAPTER II.

A SUCCESSFUL DEBUT.

RIGGED in his up-to-date bathing suit of blue, armless, legless, and décolleté, Leffen surveyed himself in the mirror with satisfaction.

"Lucky I got browned up at Coney

this season," he reflected. "Makes me look the part, all right. But I hope I ain't called on to save anybody. I'll keep the girls in shallow water."

He went downstairs and found Jenkins waiting for him. The landlord appraised him admiringly.

"Say," he acknowledged, "you're a real ad for the place, all right. The girls is gettin' down on the beach. Come on an' I'll introduce you."

He led the way by a few sparse trees, between which were swung hammocks and swing chairs, to a golden strip of beach glistening under the August sun. A bevy of damsels reclined upon the sand. Leffen took one look, and was glad he was there.

Elihu did the honors with the easy nonchalance which attaches to the camaraderie of suspenders and shirt sleeves. "Ladies," he announced, "Breezeblown never does nothin' by halves, as the washwoman says when the wind wallops the Monday clothes off the line. Here's Mr. Leffen, the life-saver I promised you, straight from New York. There ain't nothin' he likes to do so much as to save young women's lives; he'd ruther do it than eat his meals. There ain't no formality here. Introduce yourselves an' have a good time."

Jenkins returned to the inn. Subdued feminine laughter attested that no resentment by the guests attended the landlord's easy-going ways.

Self-consciousness was not one of Leffen's weaknesses. He entered into the rôle as if to the manner born. His smiling eyes surveyed the row of charming faces. Two or three more girls were approaching the group from the inn. In their wake followed a couple of young fellows garbed for bathing. One experienced glance assured Leffen that they did not count. He threw himself on the sand beside them. "Mr. Jenkins has told you my

name—the last one,” he said. “The first one’s Andy. What’s all yours?”

Had there been any ice upon this initial meeting, it would have dissolved in the sunny laughter which followed his sally. A little later, while they stood in a row, waist-high in the gentle green swell, Leffen performed a few simple illustrations of the swimmer’s art. Facing them, with the water laving his manly chest, he imparted first principles to the timid.

“The breast stroke is the first,” he said. “It’s very simple when you get the knack. You can paddle around a month, and then—pop!—it comes to you like that—usually by accident. Mine came that way. I was about eight, and had run away up the Hudson with a lot of older boys. We went in swimming in a pond. I was paddling around, up to my ankles, when Tad Larigan picked me up and threw me into deep water. Give you my word, I got the breast stroke right then, swimming out, scared to death. Think of it! When I was eight years old!”

He illustrated to the extent of a dozen strokes, covertly watching their faces and those of the two young men. Everybody was impressed. He was distinctly relieved. It was fortunate that there were no crack swimmers in that bunch.

“All you’ve got to do,” he continued, addressing his remarks particularly to Clara Langley, a pretty, blue-eyed, and flaxen-haired school-teacher from the Bronx, “is to think of a frog. Kick like a frog behind, while you move your arms in front of you—so; with the palms, so. In a few days, after you’ve got this, I’ll show you the side stroke. You could keep going all day on the side stroke.”

Then he turned, and, by way of exhibition, swam slowly out to a raft some fifty feet beyond the line. You may be sure that he swam slowly. The water was smooth enough, but Leffen

was used to the brine of Coney. He missed the buoyancy of the sad sea waves. This fresh water was heavy; it seemed to clutch him and drag him under. He swam upon his side, one ear of generous size submerged. A breath of breeze flung a dash of spray into his noble nose; he strangled unostentatiously. He stole a look at the raft; it was still some distance away. He was glad when he dragged himself upon it.

Standing there, however, he had the satisfaction of noting that the favorable impression which his performances had produced was retained. The two young men were envious; that was evident.

Leffen rested in the sun a while, then poised upon the raft for the dive and the swim back. He would have preferred to slip quietly into the tide, and set out without getting his blond head under water. But that was out of the question; they were all watching him.

He made a false start or two, and continued to wait, stealing wary looks toward the unsuspecting group. He didn’t like diving very much; sometimes he managed rather cleverly, and again he made a mess of it. He could never remember about the confounded breathing. He had tried repeatedly to inhale under water, and he knew it couldn’t be done. He must surely remember this time.

With a precision born of desperation, Leffen launched forward in the most beautiful dive of his career. Like a shot he slipped under the sliding, green surface, his breath expelled slowly and regularly, hands outspread before him, and legs trailing in full obedience to the rules. He came up triumphant full twenty-five feet from the raft. As his pink ears emerged from the tide, they were saluted by “Oh’s!” and “Ah’s!” With abounding elation, he swam to shore. Never had he negotiated such a “peachy” dive.

CHAPTER III.

AFRAID OF THE WATER.

BACK again on the beach, Leffen received an ovation. Under the soft flattery his soul swelled like a balloon. He was now honestly believing the boasts he had made about his swimming.

Clara Langley was plucking at his muscular arm. He gazed down at her lovely, slim, young form, incased in the latest, charming 1916 beach mode, a symphony in blue and white.

"Oh, Mr. Leffen," urged Clara, "do come over and try to induce Miss Colegrove to go in. She never swims with the rest of us; just sits on the beach and reads. She must be timid."

Leffen turned to notice, for the first time, a big, white umbrella. Escorted by the bubbling Clara to the girl under it, he was introduced to her. He caught his breath in very wonder. It seemed to him that never in his life had he beheld such a beautiful creature. Presently he found himself bowing over a slim, white hand, gazing into a pair of searching and slumberous dark eyes. A long, light wrap concealed whatever type of bathing suit this charmer affected; her hair, that was probably dark, like her eyes, was concealed under a yellow oilskin turban. Her face? Leffen cudged his memory. Her face held a haunting resemblance—to whom? He gave it up.

"I'm very glad to meet you, Miss Colegrove," said Leffen. "Will you not come in? The water's fine! How does it happen that you're of the merry party, and yet not with it?"

"Oh," explained Clara Langley, "Miss Colegrove isn't of our party. She was here when we came. She just sits and reads and reads. Make her swim, Mr. Leffen?"

"Join us——" began Andy, when the young woman interrupted him with a horrified gesture.

"Oh, don't ask me, please! I like to sit and watch others enjoying the water these summer, surfy days, but none for me!"

"Drag her in, Mr. Leffen," said Clara, with a laugh, and she scampered back to the group.

Leffen threw himself on the sand by the young woman's side. "Maybe you'd rather read than prattle with me?" he suggested confidently.

She closed her book as her slumberous eyes, holding the glint of a smile, turned to his quizzical ones. "If that were the case, you can bet I'd tell you, quick," she answered.

"Good! What part of the country are you from, Miss Colegrove?"

"Little old New York."

"I knew it!" he exclaimed. "I'm from there myself. Up for a whiff of the country air you read about. It's all they say. But I wouldn't like to be stuck here for life. I'd feel as if I had glass over me. Look here, if you don't mind my bluntness, I've seen you before somewhere."

She smiled. Her voice was wonderfully low and soft. "Quite likely," she said. "New York is the biggest and the littlest place on the map."

"You've said it! On Beeway, maybe, or almost anywhere else. Do you ever go to Coney Island, for example?"

"Oh, yes, I *have* been there; but not for example," she answered, and they both laughed.

"Oh, I see," he said. "You go there for the surf—the bathing?"

"I didn't say I hadn't *ever* been in," she replied; "but I *hate* it, I tell you!"

She cast a look toward the group of girls on the sand. "Their eyes are calling you," she reminded him. "They want their gentle instructor to resume instructing."

"Let 'em wait," he replied joyously. "I've found a whole stageful of charmers in one. Besides, I'm not a regular instructor—I'm a life-saver."

She looked him over appreciatively. "That must be a great business," she said musingly.

"Oh, it is!" he assured her. "And when you get to think of it, it's a noble calling, too."

"It surely is. How many lives have you saved?"

Leffen had never been lacking in self-assurance. "Well," he replied, "I haven't saved any, yet. It's my first season."

"Oh, I see!"

"But the thing is to be ready when your services are needed," he added earnestly. "Nothing like being Billy on the spot to put a crimp in the ravening waves."

"Right-o!" she assented. "What did you go in for before you took up life-saving?"

"I'm still a clerk in a real-estate office in West Forty-second Street," he answered briskly. "This is my first life-saving job. My salary as a clerk is not princely. So I took this job to pick up a little loose change during my vacation. The practice will be good, and I may make a record that'll get me a big job later."

"Sometimes a life-saver goes through a whole season on a crowded beach and doesn't get a chance to save a life," she told him, brooding, dark eyes fixed on his face. "And the pay isn't so big, I'm told. You'd better stick to your real estate."

"Well, maybe I will," he said, anxious to veer away from the subject. "Anyway, I'd like to save your life."

"You won't have the chance!" she returned. "I'm not going in the water, thank you."

He leaned forward, all earnestness. The recent episode of his dive had given him all confidence. He had made the best dive of his somewhat limited career. It all lay in the will, in the forgetting of self, in the fusing of power. This thing he had found for

himself, this simmering August afternoon, he could pass on to this young woman, weighted, as he had been, with the spirit of timidity, which was now conquered.

"Listen to me," said Leffen solemnly: "I'll tell you what is the matter with you. It's fear. You've got to sit on it; you've got to get it by the neck, and choke it!"

She looked at him thoughtfully, her slim hands crossed in her lap, while she leaned back against a buttress of sand which she had piled for herself. "Maybe that's so," she acknowledged.

"I was like that once," he went on. "I was as afraid of the water as a cat. When I was a kid I'd cry at getting into a bathtub. You see? You've got to kick yourself into action. I just kept on! I got to be some swimmer! Did you see that dive I made to-day?"

"Yes; that was surely a splendid dive."

"It was the best dive I ever made. I was always afraid to dive. I can swim like a fish, but I was always scared at diving. But to-day—well, I can tell you of it now because I *beat* it to-day. Don't you see, I'm trying to *help* you."

She searched his face with slumberous eyes. "You mean you want to teach me to swim?" she questioned. "Do you think you could be patient with me?"

At the note in her deep, low voice, wistfully pathetic, Leffen's soul went out in chivalry and something deeper. An exact count might have revealed that Margie Colegrove was the sixth girl that he had wanted to marry in the past two years. But, looking into her eyes, he knew that this—was different.

"Patient with you?" he echoed. "Why, I could be patient with you for life! And I'll teach you to swim, all right; you needn't be afraid of that. Come in and take your first lesson now."

She glanced toward the rippling

waters, shivered, and shook her head. "No," she decided; "not to-day. To-morrow, maybe. Perhaps I can make up my mind to it."

She rose, looking little and dainty in her white wrap from the vantage of Leffen's height. Her appealing dark eyes were upraised to his own.

"I must go back to the hotel now," she told him. "I'll see you on the beach to-morrow morning."

"Shall I not see you to-night?" he pleaded.

"No. Wilkins is going to drive me over to Pinckney, where my mother lives, and I'm going to arrange to have her come here with me in the next few days. I'll be back late, but I'll see you in the morning."

With a cordial handclasp, like that of a man, she was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

A DREAM OF CONQUEST.

LEFFEN gazed after her till she had disappeared in the doorway of the inn; then he returned to where the group of girls had been. The group had melted away; the neglected maidens had left the beach. That afternoon they made it plain that they had sent Andy to coventry, but what did he care? He ate lunch by himself, dinner ditto, and found himself pleasant company. His thoughts were gay, companionable.

That night he walked apart under the stars, surrounded by scenery, picturing a future wherein he and Margie—he had learned her given name—where he and she were always together. He went to bed to dream of the time when, by grace of his eagle brain, he had so manipulated the realty checkerboard as to own half New York, and Margie had all her hairpins studded with diamonds.

He slept late, and was awakened by a strong wind, instinct with watery freshness, whipping in through his open

window that overlooked the lake. Springing from bed, he cast a glance toward the wide waters. Under the lash of a steady wind from the north, they were tumbling like the ebullient whitecaps of Coney.

Breakfasting with ardor and dispatch, he got some stationery from the office and wrote some letters in his room, afterward getting into his swimming suit. He beheld the group of girls on the shore as he padded across the veranda, down the steps, and toward the beach. Yes, and there was the big, white umbrella.

A step thudded beside his own. The landlord, Elihu Jenkins, appeared alongside, clad in an old-fashioned, two-piece, black swimming suit. The breeze toyed with his few strands of gray hair.

"I'm an old hand at this," communicated Elihu. "I like it when the wind's up. Wish I was younger. Well, we'll give the girls a time, but they've got to stay in where it's shallow."

"Surely," absently acquiesced Andy, and made for the white umbrella. Margie was under it, garbed as on the preceding day, and reading a book. Leffen noticed that it was paper covered, and that its title had to do with the fortunes of Lydia, the beautiful saleslady.

"Coming in?" he asked eagerly, throwing himself down by her side.

She looked up at him calmly. "You ought to be instructing," she suggested. "You'll lose your job, first you know."

"I'd rather stay here," he returned, chilled a bit by her unexpected manner.

She was not looking at him. Her dark eyes were turned toward the heaving waters of the lake. "Well!" she exclaimed, "that old boy could *swim*, once!"

Leffen looked with her. Old Jenkins was disporting like a porpoise twenty feet out from shore, while the ecstatic shrieks of the feminine bathers, step-

ping daintily about the shallows, pierced the air.

Leffen turned to Margie Colegrove. "Come in," he urged.

"I?" she said, in horror. "I should whisper not!" Then she resumed her reading.

Feeling distinctly out of it, Leffen rose and walked toward the group of bathers. Within his neglected soul smoldered resentment. He approached two or three of the girls. They turned their backs. He glanced toward the white umbrella. Margie remained engrossed in her book.

Leffen's moody gaze turned toward the breakers which crashed upon the shore. He'd show her; he'd show that snippy gang of girls; he'd show Jenkins; he'd show them all. There came to his memory his exploit of the preceding day. Within his spirit there welled a sense of stubborn power.

He wallowed out into the surf to where Jenkins was standing breast-high, lowering his gray head like a bull's to meet the recurrent charges of the waves.

"Hello, Mr. Leffen!" called out the old man, breathless. "Into the thick of it, hey?"

Leffen pushed past him. "I'm going to swim out to the raft," he said.

"Don't try it; it's too rough!" warned Jenkins, whose further speech was swept away by the thunderous onslaught of another white-fanged comber, through which Leffen plunged in approved style.

At first, buoyed up in the surges by that odd exhilaration, the amateur lifesaver did very well—better than he had ever done in his life. He remembered breath control; he recalled the smooth side stroke; he slipped through the sliding, spumy billows like oil. Now the raft bobbed close to hand, while about boomed and bellowed old Ontario aroused.

His spirit winged in a fierce, ele-

mentary joy. Now he would make the remainder of the distance to the raft with a stroke that had always eluded him, the trudgeon. He would become a merman all at once.

He turned over and swung his right arm for the roll. The change of position, and concentration upon the baffling stroke, caused him to forget to watch his breathing. In that instant a great breaker crashed down upon him. It was as if he had inhaled, swallowed, and absorbed half of the raging lake.

Gasping, coughing, choking, blind terror seized him. He plunged and wallowed desperately; his frightened eyes groped through the spray of this devouring terror for the raft. It was farther away. Unseen devils clutched at his legs, dragging them down; his arms were like dead; he could no longer see.

Then he felt something clutching his hair, something with the suggestion of a haven of support. His groping hand touched a human form. Dimly divining that Jenkins had swum out for him, he sought, with the instinct of the drowning, to writhe about his rescuer. Something hard and snappy and of incredible jarring impact thudded on the point of his jaw. He straightened out, as limp as a rag.

He opened dazed eyes. In his ears were sounds of odd contrast; the washing of many waters, the gruff tones of men, the shrill clamor of women. Then came the ring of an authoritative voice, directly above him.

"He's all right now. Get away from him, all of you; I've got something to say to him."

He looked up into a dark, feminine face that possessed an odd familiarity. It reminded him of somebody's—whose? Two stern, dark eyes were boring into his, a mass of glorious black hair streamed over a pair of athletic shoulders. White wrap and yellow oilskin cap lay close to them.

A form of lovely contours, in a daring one-piece swimming suit, hovered over him.

"I just want to tell you never to pull off a fool stunt like that again!" commanded Margie Colegrove. "Only an expert has any business swimming in such waves, and you're no expert. They're born; not made."

"Old Jenkins must be an expert," he gasped. "He pulled me out."

"He never did," a bystander told him. "Miss Colegrove pulled you out." "What?"

It was not a smile she flashed him. It was an impish grin. "Yes," she assured him. "I sent Jenkins back. He was willing, but winded."

Leffen cast a bewildered look at her, at the others, who stood at a distance, as she had bidden, curiously watching, then back to her.

"Why," he stammered, "who are you?"

She bent nearer, with smiling eyes. "Look closer!" she said. "You said I reminded you of somebody. Look!"

CHAPTER V.

BACK TO REAL ESTATE.

LEFFEN looked. Gradually there became clear upon the marvelous retina of memory the pulsing, perspiring pandemonium of Forty-second Street upon a sweltering August day in little old New York. He was streaming down the thoroughfare. He paused a moment by a window wherein was displayed a flashy lithograph. A modern Undine, with wonderful hair; disported in the surf with an overhand stroke.

Copies of that lithograph had figured in many windows and on many walls and boards these four years past, throughout America and in lands across the sea. Leffen had caught in the face of the girl now bending above him a

haunting resemblance to—herself, the marine sensation of two continents.

"Christine Linscom!" he muttered, dazed; "the champion woman swimmer and diver of the world! No wonder you could haul me out! But what are you doing up here?"

Across her face drifted the reminiscent shadow of rebellion. "I ran away!" she answered. "I got sick and tired of water! I wanted a vacation. I beat it while I was exhibiting down at Atlanta, and shot up here. My real name's Margie Colegrove; my mother's living seven miles out here, on a farm I bought for her. The manager's been to see her already, but she was mum. That's the reason I stayed here; they'd never think of looking here. I'm supposed to be showing on the Southern coast now."

"But your swimming suit," he urged, "and sitting on the beach in view of the water, and all that?"

"I like to look at the water, all right," she said, "but I got tired of being in it; don't you see? And I sat here for fear one of those fool girls would get out too far. I sized you up yesterday, and knew you weren't any life-saver. So I stayed here to be ready in case help should be needed."

Leffen winced.

"There, there," soothed the girl, "you don't have to swim for a living. Go on back to real estate."

Leffen forced a smile. "And I was fool enough to expect to marry you!" he said, with a sigh.

"That's all right; you've got a lot of years to be a fool in," she consoled him. "You're a nice boy. I'd as soon marry you as anybody. But I'm wedded to my art. That's an old one, but I mean it."

"When I asked you what your work was," he grumbled, "you said you were a demonstrator."

She had been watching the water. Now she turned her eyes to his. Little

devils danced within them. "That was true," she assured him. "I can *demonstrate*, all right. Watch me! And tomorrow I'm going back. I hear the water calling me!"

She sprang up and ran to the beach, upon which the surf was pounding. They all whirled, gaping, as she plunged lithely into the teeth of a crested wall of water. Like a dart, she slipped through the boiling surges, straight as a die for the distant raft, face and figure buried in the water as she shot on under the whipping impetus of the Australian crawl stroke.

In an amazingly short time she gained the raft, waved a hand toward

the group, threw a double-front somersault into the foaming tide, and started back like a human fish.

Before she had reached the beach, Leffen was in the haven of his room, in the inn. He was hastily throwing things in his grip.

"The first train back to little old New York and real estate for me; it's the only summer resort," he said to himself. "A life-saver rescued by a woman? No, thank you. I can't face the people around here after that, even if the lady is the champion swimmer that won't be Mrs. Leffen. And I was going to teach her to swim! Come to think of it, I'm sick of water, too."



JUST BLARNEY

By Anna Marble

LITTLE laughin', teasin' Nora!
Well she knows that I adore her.
Whin she coaxes: "Buy me that.
Arrah, don't be stingy, Pat!"
Sure, her roguish eye's so blue,
What's a simple man to do?

Little dimpled, cunnin' Nora!
Small the use 'tis to implore her:
"Have a care, Acushla! Say,
What if there's a rainy day?"
"Oh," sez she, "the coat you buy
Whin it rains will kape me dhry!"

Little darlin', cuddlin' Nora!
Sure, I'd lay me life down for her;
And I'm feared if I don't spile her
Some spalpeen would soon beguile her.
"G'wan," she sez, sez she, "ye know,
Patsy, you're me only beau!"

Little wheedlin', petted Nora!
Faith, I never can deplore her
Spendin' all me wages while
She'll reward me wid her smile.
Blarney, 'tis? Well, I know that,
But I'm just her foolish Pat!

Under the Old Spell

By
Francis J. Dickie.



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

NOTHING IN RETURN.

BILLY DANVERS looked around the littered news room of the Northtown *Daily Capitol*, through the big windows of which the dusk was beginning to creep. "Well, I'm through," he said. "I'm sick of it all, and the end of this week sees the last of it for me. Then I'm going North and drive dogs and be primitive and fatten on fresh-killed moose meat and live once more.

"It isn't any good, all this," he went on, after a moment, waving his arm in a way that took in the room and all the city around; "it gets you." His voice died away; from below came the sudden sound of slackening presses; their noisy roar, which had filled all the room, softened, then faded away; the faint tremor of their vibrating ceased. A long moment of apparent stillness followed in the wake of the absolute cessation of this greater sound. Then, from beyond, there floated in the muffled beating of the city's life; the throbbing tone of its trafficking; a voluminous muttering of a thousand varied

noises meeting and mingling into one great diapason.

His eyes fastened on the news editor, seated at his flat-topped desk, Danvers caught the drone of the metropolis, and, with it in his ears, he broke out afresh: "You've been at the grind, now, how many years?"

"Thirty next Christmas," Foster answered slowly.

"And what have you got—a forty-dollar-a-week job in a city of a hundred thousand! Forty dollars a week, and you're getting old. And you've been in the game too long not to know that they don't want old men in this business. It's youth they want—youth, with its freshness, its quickness of wit, of feet and eyes. Oh, I tell you," he went on passionately, "it's no good! It burns you out; burns you out quick, and gives nothing in return. Why, you haven't even got a name. For all your years of reporting and editing, you're just simply plain Jack Foster, whom nobody knows outside the immediate vicinity of the office."

The news editor nodded his head in a tired manner. His eyes, behind the thick-rimmed glasses, were weak and very weary. Yet suddenly, with the

nodding assent he gave to the other's words, there flared the faintest gleam of light. "All you have said may be true enough," he said, "but why go to the frosty North and train dogs? What do you know about such things, and where is that a better life than the one that you are leading here? Here, you've at least got steam heat and comfort, and"—with the old, habitual outlook of the wage earner—"you've always got your thirty a week. After all, the newspaper game isn't too bad. You're twice as well paid as store clerks and most office men."

"Yah! Yah!" The words fairly rushed from Danvers' lips. "Store clerks and office men, you say? Good heavens! Say, to hold my job I've got to know more things than a railroad president, a ship's captain, and a ward boss combined!"

The light went out of the news editor's eyes. "Yes, you're right," he admitted. He had heard the same argument put forth whenever newspaper men had clashed. It was the all-powerful, all-convincing argument—the final word upon the question of the inadequacy of newspaper men's salaries.

"But," after a long moment he went on, "I still fail to see wherein chasing behind a string of huskies across arctic snow wastes is any improvement. You don't belong to that world."

The reporter smiled. "That's just like a newspaper man," he said. "Here you and I have been working together for nearly two years now; been digging up outsiders' pasts, pulling reputations to pieces, dragging people into the slime—and yet you don't know the first thing about me or my past. Why, man alive, I was born in a log cabin, way North, where the world sleeps under the frost eight months in the year. Don't belong! That's just it; I do belong. I don't know why I'm here." He ended abruptly, and turned away toward the door. "I've got to be going," he said,

as he left the office. "Might be some new developments in that Rate murder; besides, I've got to interview a railroad mogul, and later cover a show."

There is perhaps no more arduous life than that of a reporter on a small daily newspaper. Unlike his fellow workers on big-city publications, his efforts are seldom confined to single news beats, or the waiting for assignments. So, in addition to covering the police stations and the courts, Danvers filled the dual rôle of dramatic editor and "hotels"—the latter consisting of interviewing what chance notables drifted into Northtown.

The four remaining days of the week following his conversation with the news editor were busy ones for Danvers. A murder on Kinistino Avenue; a big opium raid along Rice Street, the city's "Chinatown;" a fête at the governor's house, and the arrival of a famous English traction magnate, all fell upon his shoulders in rapid succession, keeping him going from early till late, leaving neither time nor inclination to resume the subject of his departure.

Once or twice Danvers' leave-taking did recur to the news editor, only to be dismissed as an improbability; for always, during the four years Danvers had served under him, the reporter had been wrapped up in his work, had made the gathering of news the first and foremost matter, something taking place over all other things. Doubtless, Foster reasoned that Danvers' sudden resolve had been the outcome of temporary homesickness; with the latter's passing would go the former.

Thus Foster was disagreeably surprised when, on Saturday afternoon, just before the paper went to press, Danvers rushed in and enthusiastically announced: "Well, Foster, I'm off Monday. Got a dandy chance for a quick trip downriver with Billy Hinchcliffe, a mining friend of mine. He's taking two New York experts in to Fort Fond

du Lac by motor boat, and, having lots of room, I'm going along as far as Chipewyan. From there I'll take a scow to Norman."

On a great city daily, from its very bigness and lack of personal touch among the workers, a man's passing goes almost unnoticed; without causing comment. But here, in Northtown, the relations between man and desk were close, friendly; and to Foster there had come a particular fondness for the departing reporter, now his star man. But, seeing the joy that was in Danvers' face, he did not utter the protest that rose to his lips. Instead—after the fashion of some men when they feel most deeply—he rose, extended a careless hand, and, as he gave the other a farewell shake, said perfunctorily: "Well, so long, Billy, and take care of yourself."

CHAPTER II.

THE GRIP OF THE WILDERNESS.

FROM Northtown to Fort Norman, on Mackenzie River, as the crow flies, is perhaps fifteen hundred miles. By water—by way of the Peace, Slave, and Mackenzie Rivers, or the Athabasca, Slave, and Mackenzie—it is a good eighteen hundred. As Hinchcliffe and his party were going to Fond du Lac, Danvers, perforce, went the Athabasca route. The first hundred miles of this way is traveled in semicomfortable style by rail to the end of the line at Landing, on the banks of the mighty Athabasca River.

Arriving here early on Monday afternoon, the little party spent the remainder of the day unloading and transporting a forty-five-foot motor boat from a flat car to the river front. The slow-falling dusk of an August evening saw everything aboard for an early start, and by nine the next morning Landing lay many miles behind, while a four-mile-an-hour current, cou-

pled with a powerful propeller, carried Danvers even farther from that civilization, of which, for fourteen years, he had been so much a part.

It was during a few hours' wait at Fort McMurray, five days later, while Hinchcliffe made some necessary repairs to the launch, that Danvers came first upon a remembered scene of the past in an old trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company, lying on the level stretch back from the river. Here, fourteen years before, on his way to the outside, following his father's death, he had spent a night. As the son of one of the great company's oldest factors, and, as one traveling under their care to the outside to be educated, Danvers had been royally entertained.

And now, brought suddenly face to face with this memory of his childhood, Danvers regretted that his father had not lived longer. Then Danvers, too, might have grown up in the wilderness to know the things of his parent; to have succeeded, in time, to the charge of a post, and be known far and wide as "Kiche Omeetao," great medicine maker—or some like name—as his father had been. In the light of the memories of his greatness, these last fourteen years since Billy Danvers, as a boy of twelve, had left the wilderness behind, seemed tawdry and empty to him.

What had all the education which his father's money had given him brought him? He had become a thirty-dollar-a-week reporter, that is all. Well, he would change it now. He would go back into the Northland, and, as an independent trader, start life anew. What mattered it if his capital were small when he had youth and strength and a whole lifetime of living before him?

As he walked about the settlement, he was greeted presently with the sight of poles and wires, the latter running into a square log shack. Moving close, he read upon the new signboard: "Gov-

ernment Telegraph." It impressed him oddly that even away out here—in summer a week's travel by water to civilization, in winter a month by dog train—the world could still be brought so near by those thin, coppery strands. Impelled by the thought, he went within and sent a ten-word message to Foster—a last farewell.

He paid the dollar fee with a strange good will—it seemed a wonderful thing to be so linked with the outside world. But after he had taken a few steps away, he was anxious to be gone. Even this far outpost was no longer the wilderness; civilization had already reached out its first tentacle; the recent installation of that line of wire had suddenly robbed the post of its standing among the silent places. He was running away from all such things as trains and wires and other mechanisms which marked the way of settled lands.

Eagerly he hurried to the wharf to see if the launch was mended. It was not; but during the next two hours' wait he kept close aboard, restless, nervously anxious to be off.

As Fort McMurray dropped behind, Danvers breathed a sigh of relief. At last he was free. The policeman-ordered world, the place of placid, pulseless things, lay forever behind him. Ahead lay the ageless wilderness, for two centuries the home of his Scottish ancestors; a land of dim trails; of many waters; of fierce, short summers, when night broke but to recede again before the new, coming day; a land of cruel winters, the nights centuries long—but yet the land of his birth, the place where he belonged.

All at once, and concurrent with these thoughts, the wondrous Northern air seemed cleaner, sharper, its invigorating tang more biting than before.

Under the spell of these emotions, the dreary little post of Chipewyan, with its scattered line of whitewashed log shacks on the barren shore of Lake

Athabasca, was a marvelous spot of beauty to him, when here, two days later, he bade good-by to Hinchcliffe and his party.

From Fort Chipewyan to Fort Norman is a long thirteen hundred miles. Over this stretch Danvers was fortunate, striking in with a scow-boat party of five prospectors bound for the Dease River country, going by Norman, the Bear River, and around the Great Bear Lake beyond.

Though it was only late in September when Danvers sprang ashore at Fort Norman, the scum ice was beginning already to thicken on the Mackenzie. A moment he watched the scow swing on down the river; then, with a queer quickening of his pulses, he stared about him.

Up the steeply sloping bank, a hundred feet above, on the lower plateau of the "ramparts," the log shacks of the trading companies showed, dwarfed and small, against the farther, rising cliffs, rearing themselves steeply behind for another five hundred feet to a treeless crest. Downriver, "Old Bear Rock" stood, a lonely sentinel, unchanged, the same awesome guardian of the place that he had looked upon so often as a child; and beyond, the mountains gleamed, a blurred line of blue in the dying light.

For a moment the utter desolation of the scene—the mile-wide river, deep, swift-flowing, cold; the treeless ramparts, austere and bare; the squatting shacks, so tiny beside the towering heights—oppressed him. A longing came for the white-clustered electric globes on their orderly row of posts down long, winding Jasper Avenue; a longing for the clang of trolleys, the glare of the great, unshaded tungsten that lit the news room of the Northtown *Capitol*, the clank and rattle of linotypes, the thunder of form trucks, and all the other many and varied sounds so long familiar.

But it passed quickly. The grip of the wilderness upon him was firm. So he moved up the bank to the post above.

CHAPTER III.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

IT had been Danvers' intention to leave Fort Norman by dog team, following the first snow, and proceed into the country along the north shore of Great Bear Lake till he found a suitable site for permanent winter quarters. His plans, however, were very vague, and the welcome of old Donald Fraser and Tommy Cameron, Fort Norman's solitary white men, was so warm and pressing that half of November slipped away before Danvers finally swung his newly purchased team of five Mackenzie River huskies onto the trail for the inland country.

But it was time well spent. He learned many things. Into the lonely lives of the two grizzled fur men, Danvers' coming had been a welcome break in the monotony of their days. Fresh from the outside, lively, glad to talk, he answered unweariedly their thousand trivial questions. At least they had seemed so to him, who knew not as yet the weight of the wilderness. And when he had unfolded his plan of launching out as an independent trader, they had listened gravely. When he had finished, just as gravely had they pointed out the folly of it.

"Ye want to be as yer father was," old Fraser had said sagely. "But that ye canna be, for he was always o' the lan', and he was a company factor. Ye can't buck the company."

Seeing Danvers had been anxious to argue the point, he had waved his hand for silence and gone on to explain: "Ye can't buck the company, because every native for three hunner' mile aboot is in their debt. They know the company'll always be here, so, no matter if ye do offer them a little higher price

for their fur, they wullna take it. You'll only be here once, they figure, and they wullna reesk sellin' to you for fear of gettin' in bad wi' us."

Pausing, and seeing Danvers still unconvinced, he had gone on: "Even grantin' ye did get some fur, which I'm no' denyin', as ithers have done it, it wudna be much, yer outfit bein' so light, and the company's steamer wudna carry it out for ye."

"But that's not right. They wouldn't dare refuse," Danvers had protested hotly.

"Oh, wud they no'?" Cameron had chimed in, in high glee. "Just try them next summer, when the first boat comes up."

The upshot of it all was that Danvers, greatly crestfallen, yet still determined on making the wild his future home, compromised. Instead of going on as a free trader, he drove north looking for a good site to build a cabin and settle down for the winter's trapping.

If he could not be a trader, he could at least be a trapper. This, at least, the great company could not bar him from.

From Fort Norman he drove ten days steadily, almost direct northeast, through a rolling, tree-dotted plain. During the three months of fierce, sub-arctic summer, this was a wonderful wilderness; a marvelous, unbelievable, flowery vista in an icy land. But now, under the spell of the frost, it lay a land forgotten. An illimitable and lonely waste of snow, these barrens stretched away, monotonously the same; over them Danvers was the only human form that moved.

Early in the afternoon of the tenth day, as he mushed along, Danvers was almost startled by the sight of a log shack looming into view dead ahead. The cabin lay back among a thick clump of stunted jack pine, and a step distant from a small stream.

Drawing nearer, Danvers noted that

though the latchstring hung down, no smoke escaped from the chimney. The place was so pleasing that a sudden hope rose that it might be deserted, thus offering to him a ready-built home for his winter's stay. 'Crossing easily the low banks of the frozen stream, he fastened the lead dog securely to a jack-pine trunk to prevent any possibility of the team attacking the sledload in his absence, while he was making first survey of the shack.

Then he swung the door open. Half through the portal, he halted, remained staring, motionless with horror at what met his gaze. The room was full of dead men. On the single bunk and around the floor, five forms lay sprawled—ghastly, emaciated bodies of men who had died the slow death of starvation.

Following the first terror of the sight, Danvers stepped eagerly forward, for the face of the man lying nearest him, long-bearded, frozen, and gaunt as it was, seemed strangely familiar. Kneeling beside the body, he stared keenly at it.

Then he recalled who it was: Deffanson, the world-renowned explorer, lost these many months, and for news of whom the world was crying.

In June, two years previously, Danvers had interviewed Deffanson, then on a short visit to Northtown before leaving for Nome, where the schooner *Mukluk*, with a full crew, and well stocked with provisions, awaited his coming. A month later, Deffanson had sailed northward in search of a new polar continent.

Then, in July, two years after his sailing, a whaling schooner had picked up, in Prince Albert Sound, quantities of wreckage of the ill-fated *Mukluk*, and the world rang with the news of the loss of the expedition. Just a few weeks later, a band of Eskimo hunters, coming out from the country along Coro-

nation Gulf to the Mounted Police post at Herschel Island, had brought papers taken from the bodies of seven men, which proved conclusively that at least part of the *Mukluk's* crew had crossed from the floe ice to the mainland. Then, because of the vastness of the country, the world began to hope for Deffanson's ultimate reappearance.

All these things were comparatively fresh in Danvers' brain. Now he remembered reading, shortly before leaving Northtown, a long article by a noted arctic explorer on the subject. According to the writer's deductions, Deffanson and his party had landed somewhere along the shore of Coronation Gulf; and Deffanson, being well acquainted with the Northland, would strike across country from there, through the Dease River country, and on around Bear Lake in an endeavor to make one of the many trading posts on the Mackenzie River.

How close had been these calculations, Danvers thought, as he stood staring upon the wasted figures, speaking so eloquently of the long, terrible struggle against the wilderness. Then his eyes centered upon the rough-board table, left by the previous inhabitant. Lying open upon it, with a pencil near, was a medium-sized notebook.

Seized with a burning curiosity so great that the horror of the situation faded, Danvers crossed to the table, dropped on the rude bench beside it, and, taking up the book, began eagerly reading.

It was a breathless tale that those pencil-written lines revealed; a tale beyond the wildest fiction Danvers had ever perused.

Caught and frozen in beyond the "tide crack," the ship had been broken to pieces by the grinding floes. But not before the crew had been able to get away. Scantly armed and provisioned, two parties, fifty and thirty strong, had reached the mainland. Di-

viding here, they had struck out separately for the Mackenzie River.

The story of all this Danvers read—the details, day by day, recounting the awful march of the larger band of fifty. Every line was heroic, and grew more so with each passing day as one by one the men dropped out.

At last he came to the final page—recent entries, between the fourth and fourteenth of November—and read:

NOVEMBER 4TH: Only about two pounds of caribou left. Everybody very weak. Made five miles to-day. Country barren of game.

NOVEMBER 5TH: Monroe went through an air hole covering a little creek. Feet badly frozen. We left him revolver, and half a mile farther on heard its report. Poor Monroe! We must surely reach Mackenzie River soon.

NOVEMBER 6TH: Made about five miles. Last of meat gone. Not a sign of a living thing.

NOVEMBER 7TH: Jorgeson and Anderson dropped out.

NOVEMBER 8TH: About sundown sighted cabin. Were all exhausted, but crawling on hands and knees made the half mile to it.

The entries ceased until the fourteenth; and then—widely sprawled, the characters hardly legible, attesting to the weakness of the writer—the last words were:

NOVEMBER 14TH: All gone but me . . . must go soon . . . the cold is numbing me . . . too weak to hunt . . . hurts even to move . . . good-by all. . . . Deffan. . . .

The shaking hand had failed to complete the signature; the man had sunk to the floor. These five, the fittest, had nearly won through!

CHAPTER IV.

A NEWSPAPER MAN FIRST.

CLOSING the book, Danvers stared upon the still forms with a respect inspired by reading the words of this simple diary, words which had stirred

him as no printed page had ever done before.

Then Danvers was seized with that strange fever which comes to every true newspaper man when he suddenly comes into the possession of a big, exclusive story. Away out here, infinitely remote, alone, a solitary dot of humanity amid interminable snow wastes, he was as excited as if the news room lay but around the corner.

"Good heavens—what a news story!" he breathed, almost in reverence.

Here was the biggest story of his life—world news! A tale a thousand newspapers over all the wide American continent and Europe would blazon forth in heavy-led extras. With this realization, he was again a newspaper man, first and above all things. And the inborn longings for the wilderness, all the primal yearnings that had been his these last few weeks dropped away, superseded and blotted out by the emotions which possessed him at the thought that he alone could present this story to the world.

Newspaper offices were impossibly distant, yet the "lead" of this great story began shaping; a torrent of words leaped and roared through his brain, demanding insistently to be given to the waiting world.

Swayed by a sudden resolve, Danvers took the book up again. Finding a blank page, he began figuring rapidly. For many minutes he calculated mileage, then added up the appalling total. The vastness of the proposition was strangely depressing. He thought over the long, winding, winter trail that he must cover afoot—long, Northern miles, hard, hostile, and cold. Truly the distance was terribly far. To cover it would cost money; all he had.

But this exclusive news which was his was worth money; lots of it. With this thought, the commercial instinct, seldom strong in any newspaper man, was fanned to life. Yes, he must go;

he must give out the news. But in so doing he would, too, reap a reward commensurate with his endeavors.

Again he went over his reckoning, hopeful that perhaps in the hasty figuring he had taken on too much mileage. From post to post he checked it. No, he had made no mistake. But wait—the thought suddenly struck him—he need not travel all that way to give the world the news; into his head flashed the recollection of the recently installed telegraph at Fort McMurray—a saving of a few hundred miles.

All at once, even with this small reduction, the way seemed short, easier to cover. Danvers leaped to his feet to depart, taking the diary in his hand. Halfway to the door, he halted; then, turning back, he went methodically through the men's clothes and piled their varied possessions upon the table. Four hundred dollars in money, a dozen rolls of exposed films—carried hopefully even with death so near—and a miscellany of watches, compasses, and letters, Danvers rolled into a bundle and took with him, fastening the door securely against the inroads of possible passing animals.

The short, winter's day was now drawing fast to a close; but, afire to reach that distant goal, Danvers swung the dogs onto the track, urging them with voice and whip to a speed never before reached in the past days of leisurely traveling.

Five days later, just as the three-o'clock setting sun was dropping behind the ramparts of the Mackenzie, Danvers' dog team, limping and weary, came to a stop before the door of the trading post at Fort Norman. Equally worn, the driver turned them loose, allowed the wondering Cameron and Fraser to carry the toboggan's load within, while he tumbled into the nearest bunk and instantly fell fast asleep.

Stiff and sore, but refusing to heed the factor's protests that he rest longer,

Danvers, early the next day, swung his rested dog team down onto the ice of the Mackenzie River.

Hour after hour he drove at top speed, enforcing fierce-voiced commands to hurry with his merciless, swinging whip. Most of the time he rode, for the sleigh—loaded now with only unused snowshoes, his rifle, blanket roll, grub, and ax and enough dog feed to last to Wrigley—allowed fastest pace.

Traveling on the unobstructed river ice, but lightly covered with snow and sometimes bare for long stretches, Danvers averaged fifty miles a day, making Wrigley on the afternoon of the fifth one after leaving Fort Norman. Here, for two of his dogs and twenty dollars, in addition, he secured a new wheeler and another to replace those of his team that had weakened under the strain.

All of the animals' pads were already badly worn. So, though the loss of a day fretted Danvers' nerves, anxious as he was to make every minute count, he laid over an extra twelve hours to permit of cutting out dog moccasins from soft but durable caribou hide.

When he once more headed for the outside, the team showed the value of the footgear and the delay. Remembering, too, Cameron's parting admonition, "When travelin' hard, feed them well!" Danvers carried sixty pounds of inconnu, a coarse, salmonoid fish, the best dog feed in the land. This allowed three pounds per dog for four days' traveling, in which time he hoped to make Simpson.

So far, everything had been in his favor. The snowfall of the Mackenzie River region, usually light, was this year more so than ever; and never once since leaving that house of death beyond Fort Norman had the weather dropped lower than twenty degrees below zero, permitting fast and uninterrupted travel.

But Danvers did not make Simpson

on schedule. The second night out of Wrigley, a savage attack of three of his first team upon the new wheeler left that animal so badly torn that he was forced to shoot it. The other participants in the battle royal had also not escaped unscarred, and their varied wounds made for slower traveling.

Berating his luck, the man accepted the lessened speed, but a baleful light shone in his eyes from hot anger at the murderous impulses of these savage brutes upon whom his success depended.

With the passing days, the grip of his desire took firmer hold. Through hour after hour of monotonous moving, as he rode or ran behind the toboggan, he constructed and reconstructed his story, sometimes mumbling aloud snatches of well-formed sentences. From this he would again fall to counting the miles and the time they would occupy. He had left Fort Norman on December 2d, and, calculating the journey on the basis of recently established distances, he figured to reach Fort McMurray by New Year's Day.

It was an impossible schedule, the dream of a madman. But, burning with the all-consuming fire of the possession of a wondrous tale, which was fanned ever higher by each petty delay, Danvers was calmly and blindly unaware that only an automaton driving automatons, and not a man and dogs, could cover such a stupendous distance in the time he allotted to it.

He arrived at Simpson on the fifteenth, two days late, to find the post barren of salable dog feed. Two precious days, and forty miles of a side trip over heavy snow up the Nahanni River to an Indian camp, were necessary to replenish his store. Warned by this of the possibility of similar scarcity at Providence, Danvers overloaded to the extent of two hundred and fifty pounds. To counteract this, he added two dogs to the string. The last of

his money had gone for dog feed at Wrigley, but, with the conviction of profits soon to be reaped, he borrowed from the dead men's roll to pay the bill.

With dogs unduly tired from moving the heavy load over a bad trail, Danvers whipped out of Simpson late on the morning of the eighteenth.

The unvarying miles of river ice; the eternal sameness of frozen landscape; the awful silence of the winter wilderness, had already begun to work strange effects upon his senses, long trained to other sights and sounds. As the days went by, Danvers sang no longer as he rode; instead, a heavy sullenness crept upon him. Through the dead, unchanging hours he brooded; at times his thoughts a chaos of storied words, and again a tangle of figures of pounds of dog feed, of days and miles and money. The increasing gap in his schedule angered him unreasonably, and he vented it on his dogs, driving harder, sticking to the trail from first streak of gray dawn till far into the aurora-borealis-lighted night.

Even with more dogs, the way between Simpson and Providence took six days; but the load was ever lightening. By a masterful cruelty, Danvers made up a little of his calculated lost time on the ice of Great Slave Lake, reaching Resolution on the thirty-first, an average of fifty miles a day. But the dogs, in every lean line of their sinewy forms, screamed the story of their condition; showed utterly their unfitness for going farther on.

Danvers came to Resolution just at the wrong time to get dogs. Ordinarily this lake post is a very haven for canines; but a recent government-survey party, bound inland to beyond Fort Rae, and a prospecting outfit intent on making the Liard country by "break-up," had cleared the place bare of available ones. Danvers besieged every one,

from the Hudson's Bay Company's factor to the missionary priest, without avail.

The few good dogs left at the post were extra valuable now, and Danvers' animals were so utterly done up, that even when he offered to supplement them with a good cash bonus, the white men shook their heads, emphatically refusing the proffered trade. After two futile days, he was about to start out, even with his worn-out team, when Johnny Loutit jingled in, with his five-dog team, prize huskies of all the Northland. They were fresh after a light trip of thirty miles from Loutit's camp.

Before he could unharness, Danvers pounced upon him in a frenzy of eagerness. It was a most unwise move, for Loutit, despite his Indian looks, was half Scotch, a born trader, sharp, keen, shrewd. Beside him the reporter, unlearned to the ways of trade, was a mere baby. And he wanted dogs, and quick! Therefore, Loutit, true to age-old instinct, took his toll.

An hour later, with a new team for the old, and two hundred and fifty dollars poorer, Danvers hit the trail up the Slave River. Yet he was thrilled with a vast gladness. The dull anger of impotence, so heavy upon him with each added refusal these last two days, dropped away before the soft, rhythmic tune of the fast-gliding toboggan. Now his goal seemed very near.

Though his start was late leaving Resolution, he figured thirty miles as done when he made camp at dark. Distrustful of the recently acquired team, he unfastened a wire toboggan lashing and tethered each of the dogs short.

This he repeated for the next two nights; then, on the third, satisfied that all danger of their turning back was past, he left them loose—and woke at dawn to find them gone.

CHAPTER V.

IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING.

WITH a cry that was hoarse and harsh, more like a stricken animal's pain than that of man, Danvers crawled out from his sleeping bag. Hopeful that he had been mistaken, he stared about. But so far as his eye could reach, there was no living thing. Then, for the first time in all these long, weary days, his iron will unbent. Dropping limply upon the snow, he buried his face in his hands; while tears of utter despair and rage welled from snow-tired eyes that had not since childhood's days been guilty of weeping.

A moment later the agony of the realization of this latest blow gave way a little to the sense of the cold. His momentarily uncovered ears suddenly nipped a warning. Pulling on ear-flapped cap, he rose; as he did so, he found his hands also numb from this brief uncovering, and crusted with little balls of ice from fresh-dropped tears. Experience of past days told him that this was no thirty-below weather, but nearer fifty—a cold snap had come at last.

Scalding tea and hot bannock and bacon revived his spirits slightly. During the meal he approximated his distance from Fort Smith as only seventy miles. In the pride of his strength, and with that ceaseless urge pressing within, he decided he could walk it in two days.

Constructing pack straps from discarded dog harness, Danvers swung his sleeping bag and grub upon his shoulders. As he was about to start, he halted; he stood several minutes contemplating the long, narrow bush snowshoes. He had never needed them; did not need them now. Yet, moved by some instinct of caution, he at last added them to his load, and, rifle in hand, started off.

At Resolution, by reason of the tor-

tuous windings of the river beyond, the winter trail leaves the Slave to swing southward overland to Fort Smith, thereby saving no inconsiderable distance. Naturally, Danvers had found this trail heavier; but riding behind the dogs, he had not noticed it particularly. Now, afoot, he was amazed at the slowness of his movement, even when going at his quickest pace. By nightfall his legs felt as numb stumps. They rose and fell, rose and fell, in mere mechanical action; and at each forward step the hip bone hurt dully. His rifle, pack, and snowshoes, a featherweight at starting, had grown to an intolerable burden. Yet he plugged stolidly on so long as he could see the trail, to make camp at last under a sullen, threatening sky.

When, stiff and sore, he crawled out of his sleeping bag the next morning, the snow was drifting down, a misty curtain of great, crisp flakes stilly enshrouding all the world in a mantle of white. It brought a rising temperature.

Through the storm he moved slowly, all his faculties intent on holding the trail in such blinding weather. Night found him still upon it, and Fort Smith unreached.

When he broke camp again in the dawn of a new day, the snow had ceased. Shortly before noon his heart leaped at the sight of the clustered cabins of Fort Smith.

As he approached the Hudson's Bay Company's store, Danvers was conscious of a racking pain in his head, as if an ever-tightening band of steel were wrapping about it, while from within something pounded all around, like myriad pneumatic guns hammering home hot rivets.

Meeting Macdougall, the factor, a few minutes later, Danvers made an unsteady demand for dogs. He did not note the shakiness of his own tones, nor realize the strange figure that he cut,

standing there, hollow-eyed and gaunt, his face dirty brown from winter weather and many smoky camp fires.

Just as the factor was about to reply, the door swung open, and McGarry, the post doctor, came in with a cheery greeting. Absorbed upon his own pressing business, Danvers turned tired eyes upon him, nodding only a curt greeting.

The doctor, however, with the first glance into the stranger's eyes, came quickly forward; without a word he took a firm grasp of Danvers' wrist, while his fingers groped for the pulse beat. Relinquishing this, he raised his eyes, as he did so emitting a little cluck of satisfaction at the correctness of his first diagnosis.

Danvers, strangely docile, his brain all in a moment gone sluggish, permitted the handling without comment; and when the doctor bade him hold a clinical thermometer in his mouth, he obeyed unquestioningly.

"Just got here in time," McGarry said, in a professional tone, as he read the temperature. "If you go to bed at once, you might beat it out; but I'm afraid you're in for pneumonia."

"Bed! Pneumonia!" Slowly, laborably, Danvers repeated the words, and even to himself his voice sounded faint and far away, just as the doctor's words had seemed the moment before. For what seemed an eternity, he stared at the man before him. Then, from within, seemingly the utterance of some one strange, infinitely removed from his real self, came a harsh laugh, a boastful articulation. "Bed! Pneumonia! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Through cracking lips the laughter came; yet in the uttermost depths of himself, Danvers felt no such desire.

After a moment, the memory of his mission returned, mastering this puzzling hysteria. Queer things still pounded in his head, yet he felt his senses clearing, as does a man op-

pressed with a feeling of impending danger.

Stepping away, Danvers shook his head. "Say," he said heavily, "I've got no time to waste. I want dogs. Have you got them to sell?"

As he spoke, he was conscious of a dull tightening in his throat; a something that made speech dragging and difficult; and though his whole being was afire with unnatural warmth, he gave way to momentary shivering.

The factor, catching a wink from the doctor, and comprehending, replied soothingly: "Sure, we've got dogs. Rest yourself a while, and then I'll fix you up."

But Danvers, too, had seen the surreptitious signal. Instantly, in the depths of his whirling brain, there came the suspicion that these men sought to bar his way. It woke the animal cunning within him, and suggested crafty action.

"All right," he said, after a moment's contemplation. "I'll sit down a while; you and your friend go rustle me some dogs."

The doctor, pleased with such ready acquiescence from his half-delirious patient, and anxious for a conference alone with Macdougall, started for his office, beckoning the factor to follow.

The minute the sound of their retreating footsteps died away, Danvers sprang up. Opening the outer door a little, he saw the two disappear within a cabin a hundred yards down the street. Satisfied, he turned his burning eyes around the storeroom, for he needed food, even if he could not get dogs. With ruthless haste, he slashed open a near-by sack, placed a portion of its flour contents within his own, then, picking up his burden, hurried out.

Turning the corner of the store, he started at rapid pace toward the trail that led to the outside. Fear that they might attempt to overtake him lent

speed to his steps, and quickly the little settlement dropped behind.

Back in the company store, ten minutes later, the doctor and the factor stared; amazed at the empty room and the little stream of powdery flour sifting down to the floor from the gashed canvas sack.

"He can't go far," the doctor said. "The distance to Mistaya's camp will about finish him. But you'd better start after him as soon as the team gets in."

The factor nodded assent. The company team, driven by his son, had gone to Smith's Landing two days before, and was due back now at any minute.

CHAPTER VI.

BENT ON WINNING THROUGH.

FIVE miles up the trail, snuggling a little back from it, and half hidden among the trees, was the camp of Mistaya, Okimow of the Fort Smith Crees. The curling smoke from his cabin caught Danvers' eyes some two hours later.

He halted. Smoke meant a habitation; a habitation spelled men, and very possibly, dogs. Striding hurriedly, the reporter reached the door, knocked, was admitted.

For thirty dollars, the last of the roll he carried, and one of the dead men's watches, Mistaya provided three mangy dogs, fifty pounds of feed, and a light carryall.

Once again Danvers swung his whip over the backs of dogs, and moved upon the trail; but no thrill came with this last accomplishment. The dull pain in his head had spread downward, till his whole body ached. As he rode, the dogs seemed mere blurs dancing fantastically ahead across the snow. But, though his head buzzed with noises, he was still keenly conscious of one insistent demand: the pressing necessity of reaching the telegraph station at Fort McMurray beyond.

Human physiology is an incomprehensible thing. Too often it puts to naught the judgment of the keenest physician, whose life study it has been. Consumptives, given up to death by the wisest doctors, have still risen to walk across a continent—and, in doing so, become hale and hearty men.

With mind centered to the very uttermost atomic part on winning through; with will refusing to give way to bodily ills; with every nerve and fiber tensed to fulfill his desire, all Danvers' being became the stronger wall against assaulting sickness. Thus, by plugging on, he won through this first incipient stage of pneumonia.

Presently he felt better. His head still ached, but the fever fire began slowly cooling.

Poor as his dogs were, he approached Smith's Landing two hours after leaving the camp of Mistaya. The little post lay but eighteen miles from Fort Smith, and not having need of anything, Danvers decided to hurry through. Just as he drove in, an outward-bound team came dashing toward him. The driver of it, true to Northland custom, where strangers are few, yelled a greeting and called his dogs to halt. But Danvers, looking straight ahead and unanswering, flung his whip-lash through the air, and his team, momentarily faltering, leaped back into its regular pace. Surprised at so odd an action, the other man stared after the retreating toboggan in a wondering surmise, which, three hours later, he and his father were to satisfy from the lips of Mistaya when he told of the outward going of the mad white man.

The one hundred and twenty miles to Chipewyan consumed four days, landing Danvers in a little before noon on the fifteenth. Thirty pounds of dog feed still were on the sleigh. It was sufficient to reach McMurray, if their rations were cut to a pound and a half a day. So penniless now, Danvers did

not tarry at the post, but swung out onto the ice of Lake Athabasca, on the last lap of the way.

A hundred and eighty-five miles was all that lay between. In a sudden frenzy at the thought, Danvers plied the whip as never before, till the mongrel brutes crouched low to the ice and raced under the pain of his driving blows.

Leaving the lake ice the next day, he ran onto a trail deep with recently fallen snow; soft, yielding, and held from blowing away by the close-ranked bush. The weather again turned colder; trees creaked; the earth cracked under the grip of the frost. Danvers judged it was between fifty and sixty below.

As the miles lengthened, the level bush country gave way to great, rolling hills, and sharp ravines. Here the snowfall had been heavier. By afternoon the dogs were floundering deep in it, and not making a mile an hour.

Danvers halted them. They were no longer useful. From now on, as long as this depth of snow lasted, as doubtless it would into Fort McMurray, he could make faster time alone than breaking trail for them. So he cut them loose, with a ruthless carelessness for the harness. Then he unlashed the snowshoes he had carried so long. At last these were about to prove the wisdom of the decision made many days back.

Seated on their haunches, the dogs, whimpering, watched him go. Half an hour later he saw one of their slinking forms following at a distance. Raising his rifle, Danvers took quick aim and fired; he saw the lean, gray form leap in the air, then fall over on its side. From out of the shadowy depths of the evergreens now leaped its companions, hastening to this new-laid feast. But evidently they understood the warning, for Danvers saw them no more.

CHAPTER VII.

WAKING THE WORLD.

SEVENTY-TWO hours after cutting loose from his dogs, Danvers was suddenly aroused a little from his deepening lethargy by a familiar sight. High up on a near-by crest of the river's bank a lone pine stood out against the spotless sky. Its lower portion was shorn of limbs; the upper, remaining ones cut in such grotesque design as to catch the eye from far and near. It was a "lobstick"—a monumental Indian honor to some great one of the Northland.

It was not the mere sight of the lobstick that aroused him—for he had passed many during the preceding weeks—but it was the remembrance of this one's particular locality. It lay but five miles downriver from Fort McMurray, and, from its extreme size and fantasy of design, had made a particular impression upon Danvers' memory when leaving it behind on his northward journey.

With the certainty at last that he was near the trail's end, the man broke into a faster walk. Even that was but a pathetic crawl, a weirdly grotesque swaying forward like a wire-pulled manikin.

It was nearly dark when Danvers turned off the ice, where the Clearwater joins the Athabasca, and into the flat lands that lie about the settlement.

Presently the small signboard, announcing "Government Telegraph," blazed like a beacon light upon his tiring brain, fast slipping into unconsciousness. Fixing his eyes upon it with a dazed, unwavering stare, he moved forward, his gait heavy-footed, queerly shuffling, the movement of a done beast making its last attempt at regaining its lair.

Into the little, boxlike telegraph office he stumbled. Standing within the doorway, he teetered as one weighed

with an excessive, tottering age, then lurched forward, sprawled leaningly a moment across the little counter, and from it fell in a heap upon the floor.

But the great, white-light flame that had brought him thus far was not doused—only dimmed. Promptly following his entrance, the wondering operator put him to bed, then called in as aid motherly Christine Gordon, a pioneering Scottish woman of forty-odd summers, who was long trained in succoring trail-worn men.

Danvers slept the clock around, to wake with pangs of hunger at the smell of the operator's cooking supper. But the reporter got none of that thick moose meat, but instead a bowl prepared by Christine. When he had taken that, there came back a sense of strength, and then came that flooding fire of words, pent up for so many days.

Waving the protesting operator aside, Danvers crawled from bed. Clad in underclothes alone, he slumped down upon a chair before the long table desk.

Hurriedly he wrote down the names of thirty of the leading newspapers in the United States and Canada, and under them the following query:

Have story fate of Deffanson. Exclusive your city for ten cents a word. How many?

"Rush this," he said, handing the paper to the operator, who, when he read it, became suddenly respectful, and sprang to the key.

Then Danvers turned to his story.

All through the long hours and days as he had marched, he had rehearsed it; planned again and again the "lead," again and again thought out every line and word. It had been always with him—the predominating thing. Yet, now, confronted with the power for its release, all the carefully molded sentences, the exact words, the master "lead," fled.

Still the story came—differently worded, of course, but no less a thrilling tale, expressing in it all the horrors of the cold; the dragging days of endless travail on that forlorn traverse; the long battle with starvation, that these men had fought before they died. And because he himself had experienced their privations; because he had moved and starved through the same desolate land; because he was telling of things that were real and near and vital to himself, what he wrote made a realistic picture.

Under the spell of his enthusiasm, he wrote voluminously, adding from time to time extracts from Deffanson's diary. On finishing, he made an estimate, and found he had written four thousand words. With the existing press rate, he concluded that this was too long; for Danvers was a small-town newspaper man, and even in possession of what he knew to be a matter of world interest, he had no conception to what lengths big papers would take such a great news story.

So he laid it aside, and, with occasional references to it, wrote a second, two thousand words long. It was a better news story—clear, concise, pithy, leaving nothing untold. Yet it lacked something. Danvers was conscious of this as he read it over, and presently realized that in the boiling down he had squeezed out all of the personal element which had made his first story seem so good to him.

Well, at any rate, it was news, and that was what he was going to be paid for. Believing that many of the lesser papers might want only brief accounts, and to be prepared against such a demand, he wrote three other stories, one thousand, five hundred, and two hundred words long. Each of these he placed on a separate hook. The number of these brought a smile. The lonely operator, sending an average of perhaps five messages a day from fur

men, prospectors, the Mounted Police, or fire rangers in the vicinity, had still adorned the office with an imposing array of files that would have done duty in a head office of the Western Union.

Proudly Danvers eyed the penciled sheets as he gave instructions as to their disposal when the replies to his queries should come in. Then he crawled back to bed, and lay staring at the stout log walls.

It is a strange fact, Danvers reflected, that in the order of things, no matter how distant, remote, or isolated be the birthplace of an event or happening of great interest, the story of it eventually reaches the outside. Always this mysterious force and matter, which the world calls "news," procures a courier, often in the strangest form, as the Eskimo who found Andrée's balloon. And now, once again, through Danvers' professional zeal, was this queer something about to fulfill its destiny; was at last to reach the eyes of millions of readers; was to figure for a brief space upon the printed pages of the world, and then, still true to its destiny, to be forgotten by the universe at large.

Now, when all those endless miles he had traveled were relegated into the past of other dead yesterdays, came the realization that he had not needed to hurry so. He alone had been in possession of the story. No one could scoop him, or rob him of it. It was his beat; it was always news until he reached the outside. Following the thought, he laughed that it was only now, after the journey was done, that cognizance of this fact should come. But the laugh was a poor, shaky thing; mirthless, almost hysterical, showing how deeply the trip had left its mark upon his nerves.

But he was too tired for long-continued thinking. The strenuous endeavors of the last three hours' writing had their effect, and soon he slept.

Danvers woke at last to the frenzied

shakings of the operator. "Good heavens, you got to get up!" that worthy gasped, in an awed tone. Loosening his grasp, he passed his hand over his brow, as one who has labored long. "I haven't had a wink of sleep," he went on. "There's two hundred wires—most of them hollering for stories, the rest from relatives of some of the parties of the crew. Why, man, you've waked the world!"

Swayed a little by the sense of his sudden importance, Danvers sat up. "Well, didn't you do as I told you—didn't you file stories to all those papers that asked for it, the minute the replies came in, like I told you to?"

"Sure, I did," the operator replied, a little nettled that he had been doubted. "But, man, they ain't satisfied; they want more; they want full details of your trip, and half a dozen want you to wire the whole contents of the diary."

Then, because he was all newspaper man, Danvers rose to answer. The story was news now; it was valuable only for the minute while it was such. To-morrow some fresh sensation would take its place.

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK TO THE OLD SCENES.

FOSTER, news editor of the North-town *Daily Capitol*, rubbed his eyes in the old, tired way. Putting aside his glasses, he rose slowly, just as he had done after the day's work for so many years. With a lifeless step he crossed from the news desk to the row of nails inside the door. Donning his coat and hat, he passed out and down onto the street, his eyes blinking even in contact with the soft light of the early-closing winter's day.

At the corner of the next block, some one hurrying along from the opposite direction bumped sharply into him. He raised his tired eyes in faint protest, and

his nearsighted eyes looked upon familiar features. A hand, hard calloused and strong, caught his own.

As in a daze, he heard Danvers' voice roaring out an affectionate greeting: "Well, well, if it ain't Foster. I was just on my way up to see you."

"Danvers! By all that's remarkable!" Life suddenly showed itself in Foster's tones. "And I thought you were stuck on the wilderness," he went on, "were never coming back."

"Oh, yes, so I was, but what could I do?" returned Danvers. Then, with pardonable pride: "Didn't you see my story? Didn't you recognize me?"

"See your story—what story?"

Foster felt the hand that still gripped his go limp as it dropped away. Danvers took a slow step back: "Why, about the finding of Deffanson."

"What! You! Sure, I read that story, but—but—I——" Foster floundered helplessly. "Why, it never struck me that that was you. The dispatches said," he went on extenuatingly, "Danvers, Canadian explorer, big-game hunter, magazine writer," and—well, you aren't any of those."

"Of course I'm not, or wasn't really any one of them, but I had the chance to be anything I liked, and now, what with the publicity I've got from finding the last of the *Mukluk's* crew, I certainly can be most any old thing. Why, I've had a dozen lecture tours offered me by wire, not to speak of half a dozen other things."

"And you're going to take them?" Pleased expectation rang in Foster's voice.

"Take them—no—— Why, you darned old fool, I was just on my way up to ask you to give me my old job back again."

Then, in answer to Foster's wondering, incredulous gaze, Danvers went on hurriedly, almost passionately: "I found out I was all wrong. All the

time I was away—though I didn't realize it at first—I was hungry for the old news room; for the thunder of the trucks carrying the forms to the elevator; for the rumble of the presses, and, oh, everything that's in the old *Capitol* building."

Danvers stopped a moment, to go on, with a little catch in his voice: "You can't get away from it—you nor I—nor any of the gang. We're all under the same spell; a spell that's always on us; that never grows weak or old! Finding Deffanson brought it all back to me. And after I got the story off, I just had to hustle back as fast as I could." He stood eying Foster, waiting.

After a moment the news editor nodded. "All right," he said. "Report at the same old time to-morrow morning." And then, out of deference to Danvers' recent feat, added: "Your salary'll be thirty-five a week from now on."

"In that case," said Danvers, grinning, "I feel that I can buy two supers; so come on."

Without a Fault

OF course, the dealer was to blame. At any rate, that's what the buyer thought. The mare in question, he declared, had been sold to him as being sound in wind and limb—without a fault, in fact.

Without a fault, indeed! Why, the poor beast—so the outraged buyer now discovered—was blind in one eye, and could see with the other only very indistinctly, if at all.

Accordingly, he wrote indignantly to the dealer, passing heavy judgment on his business methods and his honesty.

The letter was so delightful and ingenuous that the dealer deigned to answer it.

"My dear sir," he wrote, "you seem to blame me for the mare's blindness.

This is most unjust. The fault is not mine—nor, indeed, is it hers. On the contrary, blindness is, and always has been, her great misfortune."

Odd, But True

I'VE seen the rope-walk down the lane,
The sheep-run in the vale;
I've seen the dog-watch on the ship,
The cow-slip in the dale.

I've seen the sea-foam at the mouth,
The horse-fly in the air;
I know the bul-warks on the deck,
And the fire-works many a scare.

I've seen a-bun-dance on the plate,
The lamp-light on the floor;
I've seen the cat-fish in the sea,
And a hat-stand by the door.

I've known the mill-race in the glen,
The heart-burn in the chest;
I've seen a door-step in the street,
And a watch-spring in my vest.

Equally Applicable

IN a case tried in a Philadelphia court the prosecuting attorney had a good deal of fun at the expense of counsel for the defendant, each of whom seemed as stupid as the other.

"Ignorance of the law," interposed the judge at a certain juncture, "is no excuse for violation of the law."

"May I inquire of your honor," asked the prosecuting attorney, "whether your honor's remarks are directed at the defendant or his counsel?"

A Common-sense Answer

WHY," asks a Missouri paper, "does Missouri stand at the head in raising mules?"

"Because," says another paper, "that is the only safe place to stand."

Hist! A Spy!

By
Armiger Barclay



BEHIND the murky window Mr. Moggeridge discerned canaries, bullfinches, puppies, and squirrels in cages. Hung on the shop front were other cages containing guinea pigs, kittens, more canaries, and a badger. He mistook the latter for a peculiarly unpleasant kind of hog, possibly a German one. He had come to buy a parrot, not a wild beast. Leaving the window, he entered the shop.

It was a gloomy place. Very little light penetrated through the blocked-up window. Strange noises and an unpleasant aroma permeated it. A forbidding-looking man in his shirt sleeves took up much of its space and glowered at Mr. Moggeridge. "Want to buy a little dorg?" he inquired.

"No, a parrot," replied Mr. Moggeridge, adding, as a reservation; "that is, if you've got one cheap."

"Cheap?" The man shook his head. "There's a great run on parrots just now, cos of the war."

"What's the war got to do with it?"

"Well, if you ask me, it's owin' to the 'igh price of poultry."

This did not sound reasonable to Mr. Moggeridge. He understood that because of the war poultry was cheaper than usual.

"Mean to say people are eating parrots?" he asked incredulously.

"That's about it. There ain't nothing better than roast parrot and onion sauce. What did you want a parrot for?"

"To talk," explained Mr. Moggeridge.

"Oh, that's different!"

The dealer's face became thoughtful. Mr. Moggeridge read in it the expression of one who has a large stock of parrots, but is unable for the moment to recall their linguistic abilities.

"I got the very thing you want," said the dealer, producing a large gray parrot in a very small cage. He held it up for inspection.

"He don't seem talkative." Mr. Moggeridge hesitated. "I mean, he's got a silent look."

"That ain't to be wondered at in a place like this. Put 'im in the sun and 'e'll talk your 'ead off."

"Why in the sun?"

"Well, a place in the sun's rather a 'obby of 'is. I shouldn't be surprised if 'e come from Togoland."

Mr. Moggeridge let the statement pass. He was not very strong on geography. "Fact is"—he sighed rather heavily—"I'm a widower. Lost my poor wife a year ago and can't get over it."

The dealer's eyes swept over Mr. Moggeridge's suit of black. "We must all be took some time or other," he observed. "Better to die in your bed than be cut up by them Germans."

"'Cut up' just expresses it. It's the awful silence, if you know what I mean. Plenty of conversation is what I've been used to, and now not a word from morning till night. I've stood it as long as I can."

"Jusso. Well, this 'ere parrot don't like awful silence neither. Talkin's what 'e's used to. A real talkin' parrot's as good as a woman in the 'ouse."

"That's what a friend of mine says. He's a widower, like me."

"Ah, a sensible man, I should think. Would 'e like a parrot, too?"

"Er—I hardly know," said Mr. Moggeridge. "Fact is, he's thinking of getting married again."

The dealer looked as though his commendation of Mr. Moggeridge's friend had been extorted from him under false pretenses. His manner changed. "Two pound I want for this bird," he said curtly.

"Rather a lot," argued Mr. Moggeridge.

"And that's only because of the war. Bein' patriotic, I've redoosed the price considerable."

After some ineffectual bargaining Mr. Moggeridge paid for the parrot, and, with a written guarantee as to its

linguistic accomplishments, departed with it.

Now, Mr. Moggeridge lived a respectable, semidetached villa life becoming a man of fifty-two and the responsible position attaching to a retired hardware dealer. Distinctly steady and unemotional, probably he might have ended his days in the calm of suburban existence without incident, but for his wife's death and the outbreak of the European war.

After twenty-five years of married life marked by the ceaseless loquacity of his partner in it, a two days' illness had stilled her tongue forever and left him in that state of awful and unaccustomed silence to which he had so feelingly referred. Even the war news had not mitigated his depression. Reading he found small compensation for personal intercourse. But now, thanks to his friend Gowlett, and the parrot which that experienced widower had advised him to purchase, he looked forward to at least some semblance of the old-time volubility.

No bird could have desired greater attention than that which Mr. Moggeridge began by giving it. He placed its cage full in the sun at the open window of his sitting room. He fed it generously; yet for several hours it remained mute. It ate well, it preened its feathers, swelling itself out in bellicose fashion, and it made noises in its throat. The noises, Mr. Moggeridge thought, were unusually guttural for a bird, and during the afternoon he deemed it advisable to go round to Gowlett and ask him to come and listen to them.

Gowlett was full of the war. All the way back he relieved his feelings in very uncomplimentary language concerning the kaiser. The title, strongly adjectived, was on his lips as he entered the room which the parrot occupied, and both he and Moggeridge were considerably startled when the bird

gave vent to a shriek that sounded like "*Donnerwetter!*"

"I say!" exclaimed Gowlett, "he's got an uncommonly strong voice." He went up to the cage. "Hullo, Polly. Scratch-a-poll, Polly."

"*Ach, quatch!*" spluttered the parrot, pecking wickedly at the finger extended toward it.

Gowlett jerked his hand back. "Did you catch what he said?" he asked.

"Not quite," answered Mr. Moggeridge. "This is the first time——"

"Hush! Listen!" enjoined Gowlett.

The parrot was muttering in a low and exasperated tone.

"Sounds as if he was in a rage about something," remarked Gowlett. "Well, as I was saying, no matter how things go, it's proved beyond a doubt that one Belgian's worth three Germans, and three——"

A succession of stridulous squawks from the parrot interrupted him. Following the squawks came a flow of language which, though incomprehensible to the two men, was distinctly vituperative in tone.

"Oh, shut up!" shouted Gowlett. "Thinks he's a bally eagle by the way he's sticking his feathers up."

"Don't stop him," said Moggeridge gently. He sighed. "Reminds me of poor Laura."

"Wants plucking," grumbled Gowlett. "When I advised you to buy a parrot I wasn't thinking of a thing with a voice like a motor horn! Here, let's go somewhere where we can talk in peace."

II.

UNDER the high brick wall that concealed Mr. Moggeridge's domain from his neighbors, two boy scouts stood in a tense, listening attitude. "Hear that?" whispered young Brown.

Young Wright nodded. "German, isn't it?"

"Yes. There it goes again!"

"*Hoch, hoch. Deutschland über Alles!*" came from the adjoining house in a defiant accent.

"Come on," said young Brown excitedly. "It's a German spy. We'll have him!"

They crept to the end of the garden, hoping from there to obtain a view of the next-door house, but a screen of laurels prevented that.

"Who lives there?" asked Wright.

"Old chap named Moggeridge."

"Know anything about him?"

Young Brown thought hard. "He had a funeral a little while ago," he ventured.

"Sounds suspicious. Let's go round to the front."

They went, and from a concealed position reconnoitered the adjoining premises. Five minutes passed and nothing happened. Then Mr. Moggeridge and his friend came out at the front door. Young Brown knew them both by sight. "They've left the German inside," he whispered. "Now's our chance. You stay and watch the house. I'll get a policeman."

He darted off, found a constable down the first turning, imparted his suspicions, and hurriedly led the way back. The gathering of the three uniforms brought a small crowd together outside Mr. Moggeridge's railings. The policeman tried the front door and found it locked. The scouts investigated the ground-floor windows.

Mr. Moggeridge, returning with the evening paper which he had gone out to purchase, wondered at the commotion and jumped to the conclusion that his house must be on fire. "What's the matter?" he asked apprehensively, as he elbowed his way to the gate.

"German spy," volunteered some one in the crowd, who somehow had got an inkling of the situation.

Rather bewildered by the statement, Mr. Moggeridge approached the police-

man on his doorstep. "What's this about a spy?" he asked.

"That's what I'm going to find out," was the grim reply. "If this is your house I'll trouble you to let me in."

Mr. Moggeridge, in a stupefied way, opened the door with his latchkey. How or why a spy should want to get inside his premises was beyond his comprehension. A German spy, too! He felt outraged. A sudden access of patriotism came over him. He felt as strongly as his friend Gowlett about the kaiser and his people.

It was accordingly a very determined Mr. Moggeridge who led the way into his own hall and picked up an umbrella from the hatstand. Outstripping the policeman and the two scouts, he began to search high and low for the malefactor. The top of the staircase was ill lit, and it unfortunately happened that in hurriedly turning a corner of the landing to descend he collided with the ascending policeman with disastrous consequences. The impetus carried him forward and the other back, and together they rolled down the stairs, crashing into the two scouts who were already halfway up.

The boys' long staves, the policeman's club, and Mr. Moggeridge's umbrella brought havoc as they fell. When the quartet picked themselves up they thought for a moment that the spy had made a sudden onslaught on them. After that the search proceeded with less enthusiasm. It was evident that the noise they had made would militate against their chance of effecting a capture. The spy must have heard them and made off. Indeed, when they entered the back room that looked onto the garden and there found the window wide open the policeman gave up the pursuit. He went off to report the matter. Young Brown and Wright clambered out of the window, still nourishing hopes of getting on the track of the

fugitive. Mr. Moggeridge was left alone.

Hot and out of breath from exertion, he dropped into a chair facing the parrot cage. In his excitement he had quite forgotten it. The door stood open, and the parrot was nowhere to be seen.

III.

NIGHT had fallen. In her garden, beyond the zone of restlessness, Miss Tampling, a middle-aged spinster of prepossessing appearance, stood gazing up into the branches of the sycamore on her small lawn. In her outspread hand was a lump of sugar, in her eyes the light of expectancy, and on the lawn a parrot cage. From amid the foliage Mr. Moggeridge's errant parrot blinked speculatively at the sugar and the cage, both visible in the light that streamed from Miss Tampling's garden door.

"Pretty Poll! Come along, then! Such a nice piece of sugar for Polly!" Miss Tampling cooed persuasively.

She had spoken the same words with variation a dozen times, but so far they had made no impression on the parrot. Its attitude remained one of mute irresolution, perhaps suspicion. "*Was ist das?*" it said suddenly.

Miss Tampling gave a jump of surprise. She understood German and spoke it a little. "*Zucker,*" she replied. "*Ein bishen zucker.* Come down, Polly. *Kommen sie herunter.*"

Whether or no it was the familiar language that inspired the bird with confidence, it responded to the invitation by alighting on the lawn. "*Himmel!*" it gurgled. "*Ich bin zu hause!*"

Within a minute or two Miss Tampling had inveigled it into the cage and retired indoors with her capture. A fortnight previously, her own greatly prized parrot had died, and now miraculously enough here was another to re-

place it. Miss Tampling was overjoyed.

When she had gone into the house, in silence and with infinite caution young Brown crept forward, keeping the trunk of the sycamore between himself and the house. He paused to listen, then turned and waved a beckoning arm. Thereupon, young Wright, two policemen, one of whom was a sergeant, and Mr. Moggeridge emerged from the bushes at the back and joined their advance guard.

"Heard him quite plainly," whispered young Brown. "He was talking German to somebody in the house."

"In we go, Roberts," said the sergeant. "The door's open. We'll have him this time!"

A quick rush, and they were in, making for the sound of voices on the upper floor. The carpeted stairs deadened their footsteps. At the top, a light streaming from under a door brought them to a stop. Guttural accents came plainly to their ears. Young Brown clutched at the sergeant's sleeve, and nodded his head vigorously. The sergeant squared his elbows and prepared to make an entrance.

At that moment the door was opened from the inside, and Miss Tampling made a sudden appearance. At first she did not see the intruders. When she did, she slammed to the door, put her back against it, and emitted a strangled scream.

"Stand aside, please, 'm," ordered the sergeant.

"Never!" gasped Miss Tampling. "What is the meaning of this—this outrage?"

"We haven't time to talk. If you won't surrender the man, we shall have to use force."

"The man! What man?"

"The spy, you're harboring in that room."

"How dare you!" Miss Tampling flushed. "That is my bedroom."

"Can't help that. A bedroom's just the place a spy would be in."

"A spy?" echoed Miss Tampling blankly.

"Yes, a German spy. Do you deny he's there?"

There was a pause. A light began to dawn upon Miss Tampling. "Very well," she said suddenly, "go in and arrest him." She flung the door open.

Mistrustful of her abrupt change of manner, the sergeant made a wary entrance. The others crowded in after him. They stood staring about them. There was no sign of a man anywhere. They looked under the bed, and investigated the interior of a wardrobe—the only two places of concealment.

"Must have got out by the window!" said the perplexed sergeant; but when he found it latched on the inside, he had to admit the incorrectness of the conclusion.

"*Um Gottes willen!*" exclaimed a muffled voice.

"That's him!" cried young Brown. "I know his voice!"

"*Quatch!*" it went again, dumfounding the five searchers.

"What game's this——" began the sergeant.

He was interrupted by an exclamation from Mr. Moggeridge. "Bless my soul! It's the parrot!" He had lifted a piece of baize which enveloped a cage standing in a corner. The other four collected round him.

"What's a parrot got to do with it?" asked the sergeant irritably.

"It's mine," said Mr. Moggeridge. "Got away this afternoon, though how it came here——"

The sergeant made an impatient gesture. "What we're after is a man, not a parrot," he said.

"There *isn't* any man," asserted Miss Tampling hotly from the doorway; and the parrot, as though in accord with the disclaimer, shrieked out a string of foreign expletives.

"Mean to say that what we heard was this bird?" queried the sergeant disgustedly.

"Yes," scoffed Miss Tampling. "And if you had sense enough to know the difference between the voice of a parrot and a man, and understood the simplest German, you wouldn't have treated a lady in this inconsiderate manner."

"This is all your fault, Rogers," said the sergeant, turning on his subordinate.

"Beg pardon, sergeant, it was these here Boy Scouts——"

But the Scouts had made off. Young Wright was already creeping down the stairs, and all that remained to be seen of young Brown was the end of his staff as it whisked past the doorway.

The sergeant gave a grunt of ruffled dignity, mumbled apologies to Miss Tampling, shot an angry glance at Mr. Moggeridge for possessing a German-speaking parrot, and marched from the room, followed by the discomfited Rogers.

Mr. Moggeridge, left confronting the lady, shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. Miss Tampling was the first to speak. "Did I understand you to say that the parrot was yours?" she asked reassuringly.

"It's a fact, ma'am," he replied nervously, and then, observing that her hand was innocent of a wedding ring, corrected himself—"Miss, I mean."

"Mary Tampling is my name," she informed him shyly. "I—I'm afraid I owe you an apology for being in possession of your parrot."

"Not at all, considering the nuisance he's been to you," said Mr. Moggeridge gallantly.

"The fact is, my own parrot died a little while ago"—Mr. Moggeridge nodded sympathetically—"and when this one flew into my garden, I couldn't resist——"

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Moggeridge.

"I should have done the same. May I explain? You see——"

"Perhaps we had better go downstairs," suggested Miss Tampling discreetly. "The first door on your left. I will join you in a minute."

When she entered the sitting room, the dishabille in which she had been surprised upstairs had disappeared. She was arrayed in her second best gown. Mr. Moggeridge thought her very attractive. He liked the touch of unartificial pink that had come into her cheeks.

"Now," she said, "tell me all about poor Polly."

IV.

A MONTH later, Gowlett, back from his honeymoon, called on his friend, Mr. Moggeridge. "Well, how's Polly?" he inquired.

"In the sitting room, mending my socks," said Mr. Moggeridge.

"Eh?" ejaculated Gowlett.

Mr. Moggeridge nodded a little sheepishly. "We got married last week," he said.

Gowlett wondered whether the war had affected his friend's brain. He had gone away before Mr. Moggeridge's intimacy with Miss Tampling had reached the romance stage. "I'm talking about the parrot," he said.

"Oh, he's all right, too. Nearly forgotten his German now. We've taught him English. That's how it all began."

"What began?"

"Love," replied Mr. Moggeridge sentimentally. He propelled his friend toward the sitting room, and threw open the door. "Polly," he called, "here's my friend Gowlett."

Mrs. Moggeridge secundus, blushing and comely, rose to greet the visitor. The parrot, from its cage in the window, gave an excited squawk. There were mutual felicitations. After a little conversation, Gowlett turned and surveyed the parrot. He noticed that

its cage was ornamented with the Allied colors. "Funny he should be a German," he observed.

"Oh, *quatch!*" went the parrot.

"What's *quatch* mean?" he asked.

"Same thing as 'bosh,'" explained Mr. Moggeridge. "Fact is, he doesn't want to be thought German now."

Gowlett looked doubtful. "Are you sure, Moggeridge?" he asked.

"Goot afternoon. Yes, please. Rule Brrrit-annia!" said the parrot.

"There you are!" exclaimed Mr. Moggeridge, with pride. "Hardly a bit of his German accent left!"

"Hoch der King! Hip-hooray!" bawled the parrot.

Looking Out for His Own

THE doctor sat at the patient's bedside and looked serious. "You should be very careful for at least a month," he said.

"Is it as bad as that?" asked the patient anxiously.

"If the result is to be as satisfactory as I would like to have it, you cannot follow the rules that I lay down too carefully."

"I will do exactly as you say," said the now thoroughly alarmed patient. "A-am I eating too heartily?"

"Much too heartily. You should eat simpler food, and not so much of it. If you follow my advice, you'll cut your butcher's and grocer's bill just about in half."

"I'll do it, doctor."

"You ought to take more exercise, too," continued the physician. "How do you go to your office now?"

"On the elevated."

"Stop it at once. You must walk to and from your office every day, rain or shine. Do you ever go to the theater?"

"Quite often."

"You mustn't do it while you're under my care. How about smoking?"

"I smoke, of course, but only in moderation."

"Don't smoke at all," instructed the physician. "Throw away all your cigars, and don't buy another for thirty days at least, or I'll throw up the case."

"I'll do it, doctor; but—but——"

"Do you drink?"

"Occasionally, but I——"

"Stop it entirely."

"A little claret on the table now and then ought not to——"

"Not a drop at any time."

"All right, doctor. What next?"

"Nothing. Follow these instructions closely for thirty days, and by that time——"

"Yes," said the patient eagerly. "By that time, what?"

"By that time," repeated the doctor, as he rose to go, "you ought to have saved enough to pay me the balance due on that little bill you have owed me for a matter of about eighteen months. Good day."

When the Witness Scored

THE case had been long protracted, and was going none too well for the defendant. His counsel, therefore, had recourse to bullying methods.

One of the plaintiff's witnesses, a notorious old jailbird, had just left the box, his place being taken by an old plasterer.

"Have you ever been in prison?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes, sir," replied the witness; "twice."

"Ah, I thought so! And for how long, may I ask?"

"First time for an afternoon. Second time for about an hour. You see, sir," continued the witness, taking advantage of the lawyer's confusion, "I was sent to prison to whitewash a cell for a lawyer who had been robbing his clients."

A Tale of the Blue Rain Joker.
Unsaintly in Santa Fe—



(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

ON A STRANGE QUEST.

COMPTON had been going West in the interest of the "house" for three winters. He went out in November, hustled until early April for the Hercules Six all up and down southern California, and then headed for Eastern headquarters. Going and coming, the house always allowed him a two weeks' lay-off in Albuquerque.

This year, Compton was getting back a little later than usual. Three days of his fortnight in Albuquerque had passed. It was May 1st, and something had gone wrong with the weather. When he sat on the Alvarado veranda it was necessary for him to wear an overcoat, and the chill in the air had frosted his dreams and made him discontented.

He felt inclined to board a fast train, go on East, and use up the rest of his two weeks at Mackinac Island in mid-

summer. Undoubtedly he would have yielded to this inclination had not a pair of brown eyes cast over him a weird and potent spell.

Those brown eyes formed the "X" quantity in his particular equation. They belonged to a fair young woman who had come from Los Angeles in the same Pullman. The brown eyes had taken notice of him at Barstow, and after that had ignored him completely. The girl, accompanied by a sharp-featured, middle-aged lady, had left the through train at Albuquerque and had registered at the Alvarado. Over his own name on the hotel book, Compton had eagerly scrutinized these signatures: "Miss Meryl Blake, Chicago," and "Miss Tabitha Parton, Toledo, Ohio." With a fine discrimination in the matter of names, he selected Miss Meryl Blake as the one for the girl with the brown eyes.

For three days he had been completely ignored, as on the train, although he felt in his soul that the girl must

be wondering about him. Fate seated them at neighboring tables in the dining room, and brought them near each other in the lobby, on the verandas, and once in Central Avenue. Like ships in the night, they crossed each other's course again and again. The persistency of chance in manipulating these meetings was truly remarkable. Compton flattered himself it might be an omen, a good omen. But at nine o'clock in the morning of the fourth day, a big, gray automobile swooped down upon the hotel, and then swooped away again with the Misses Blake and Parton. Their bags went with them, and it seemed they had undertaken a motor journey of some magnitude.

"Here's where destiny loses out," thought Compton glumly. "'Two shall be born the whole wide world apart,' and all the rest of it, but I guess the sentiment goes lame when you take it out of poetry and put it to the test of real life. Ho, hum! I might as well jump the next train and get back to the place where the Herc Sixes are made." He sighed as he reached for his cigar case. "Certainly," he murmured, in a voice tintured with regret, "Miss Blake is a wonderful girl."

Just here came the call of a boy from the office, paging "Mr. Compton." The latter halted him and received a telegram. It was from Joe Hazlett, and had been sent from Flagstaff, Arizona. It read:

Get automobile and make rush trip Albuquerque to Santa Fe. In Santa Fe look through curio stores for blue rain god marked T. D. Get this rain god and get it quick. I am leaving for Santa Fe by first train. Big thing in this for you if you win out. Will explain when I see you. Hustle. Look out for one-eyed man named Leeper. Beat him to it. HAZLETT.

Compton read the message carefully three times, then sank back in his chair and drew a long breath. What the deuce was it all about? What was a rain god, anyhow? And why was prosy,

matter-of-fact Joe Hazlett so excited that he squandered all that money on superfluous language at day rates? There was much mystery coupled with the call to action.

Hazlett had sold Hercules Sixes in San Diego, but had left the automobile business to interest himself in mines in the new camp at Oatman. He knew Compton was in Albuquerque, for he had met and talked with him on the train between Barstow and Needles. They were good friends, Compton and Hazlett, and Hazlett had tried hard to interest Compton in a "good thing" in the mining district. Compton, however, had once lost more than he could afford in a much-touted "true-fissure vein," and had balanced his losses on the ledger of experience with the two words, "Never again."

Loyalty to a friend demanded that Compton do what he could to help Hazlett corral his blue rain god. The "big thing," held out as a spur to Compton, did not enter into his consideration of the affair.

Anyhow, Compton had always wanted a look in on Santa Fe. Hazlett's request was his opportunity. It was nothing to Compton, this business of his friend in the matter of the rain god. In acting the part of agent for Hazlett, Compton would have something to do, something that would carry him into the oldest city on the continent and plunge him into the storied past. He would get a Hercules Six and go. Brown eyes were eclipsed in his mind by a vague fetish done in blue and marked with the initials "T. D."

Quickly Compton packed his bag and suit case, settled his hotel bill, and then made his way to a Hercules Six garage and service station. There Hoffman, the proprietor, promptly, but kindly, discouraged him. "It's sixty-five miles to Santa Fe," said Hoffman, "and it has been raining in the mountains. You'll have to ford Santa Fe Creek

twice, and if you don't bog down I'll miss my guess. Then——"

"Bog down with a Hercules Six?" asked Compton. "What are you talking about? With that car I can go through a sand mountain on 'second,' and I don't know but I could on 'high.'"

"Then there's La Bajada grade with eighteen hairpin turns," continued Hoffman. "A good road, yes, but if it happens to be wet——"

"Tut! There's no road too slippery for a Herc car. Let me have that roadster, Hoffman, and I'll agree to reach Santa Fe in three hours."

"Well, it won't be wise for you to go alone," said the garage man. "Why don't you take the train and run up from the junction?"

"While I'm waiting for a train I can be in Santa Fe—and this is a rush order."

"I'll send Spence Hackley with you," Hoffman proceeded. "He knows every inch of the way, and if any one can get you through Santa Fe Creek and up Bajada when it's moist, it will be Spence."

"All right," agreed Compton; "Hackley can go as guide, counselor, and friend, but I'll do the driving."

The Hercules Six was a great car. Compton could have told you just how great it was. The engine under its hood was the finest product of the automobile industry; and all but the top, tires, and carburetor were made in one gigantic factory. The component parts of the Hercules Six were not bought piecemeal from other manufacturers and assembled. "All under our own roof" was the slogan of the makers.

Spence Hackley ran the roadster out of its stall, filled up with gas and oil and water; then, in order to make assurance doubly sure, he hung a three-gallon water bag over the extra tire behind, and filled that.

"One would think the old Hercules Six drank like a fish, Hackley, from the

amount of wet stuff you carry," remarked Compton. "I'll bet the eighteen hairpin curves of La Bajada couldn't make her steam if you took them half a dozen times, hand-running."

"You don't know this country same as me, Mr. Compton," answered Hackley. "Any engine'll boil if you use the 'low' a lot, and that's what we got to do, this trip."

They halted at the hotel for Compton's luggage, and it was eleven o'clock when they pulled out along First Street, pointing for Sandia. The engine was running "like a stream of water"—to quote Hackley—and hurling its power smoothly and quietly into the rear wheels. Compton, who drove, tramped on the accelerator, and pride rose in his breast as he noted how the car "picked up" with all the ginger and "pep" of a spirited horse. Spence Hackley sat back in his seat and smoked one of Compton's cigars. As a guide he was of small importance, for the road was thoroughly sign-posted; but he was some one to talk to.

"What's a rain god, Hackley?" Compton inquired, deftly evading a chuckhole.

"Hey?" returned the astonished Hackley, around the cigar.

Compton repeated the question.

"Oh, that!" exclaimed Hackley, wondering, no doubt, why such a matter should interest his companion. "Why, a rain god is an Injun idol that's mostly sold to tourists, I reckon. This here's gen'rally a dry country, Mr. Compton, and the Injuns need water for their crops. So they fix up the idol for a bluff at makin' it rain. So fur as I can see, though, travelers get most all the rain gods."

"Are they expensive?"

Hackley laughed. "Fifteen cents apiece, or a couple for two bits," he answered. "Five dollars'll buy a wagon-load of 'em."

Compton was becoming more and

more mystified over his friend's eagerness to secure the blue idol in Santa Fe. "What are they made of, Hackley?" he asked.

"Pottery."

"What is the prevailing color?"

"Sometimes they're jess yellow clay, and sometimes the clay is painted in black lines, with red in between."

"Ever see any blue rain gods?"

"Blue? There ain't no such thing as blue rain gods. I've seen a sight of 'em, Mr. Compton, but never a one that was blue. Look out, now," Hackley added, suddenly shifting the subject, "we're coming to the creek. The water's runnin', and there's another car stuck in the sand on the farther bank."

The creek was a shallow sheet of water, about three or four yards in width, but the sloping banks were heavy with sand. Tracks showed where automobiles had turned out of the road and run over brush tops scattered to give the wheels better traction. Close to the deep sand, Compton halted the roadster to get his bearings.

His keen gray eyes followed the broken brush tops to the water, then he looked across the creek to where a large gray touring car was making the sand fly in a vain attempt to dig itself out. Compton's heart leaped as he gazed at the other machine. Unless he was greatly mistaken, it was the very car that had borne Miss Meryl Blake and Miss Tabitha Parton from the Alvarado Hotel some time before. At last, he thought, his chance had come.

"Put her into 'low,' Mr. Compton," Hackley urged. "Mebby we'll get stuck, even at that. The car, over there, has plenty of power, but you see what's happened to her."

Compton laughed softly as he shifted the gears. Why hadn't those Albuquerque people the same faith in the Hercules Six that he had?

Rumbling savagely in "low," the roadster crossed the brush-covered

sand, swished through the water, and climbed the farther bank without a hitch. At a point just beyond the stalled car, Compton halted and jumped out of his seat. "Can we be of any help?" he called, facing the machine behind.

There were three passengers in the touring car, a man at the wheel and two ladies in the tonneau. Compton, ignoring the man, was speaking to one of the ladies—the younger one with the brown eyes.

CHAPTER II.

UNACCOUNTABLE BEHAVIOR.

A LOOK of recognition leaped into the brown eyes and a smile of gratitude and relief came to the girl's lips.

"Isn't this terrible?" she asked. "And we are in such a hurry to reach Santa Fe, too! I was wondering how on earth we were going to get out of this sand. You'll surely be a friend in need if you can do anything to help us."

Here the middle-aged lady spoke up, her voice keen and full of reproach: "I told you so! We could have caught the train to Santa Fe if you had been patient and waited two or three hours. But, no, you insisted on hiring this automobile, Meryl, and now we'll never get to Santa Fe. Next time, I guess, you'll listen to me."

Compton mentally patted himself on the back. Here was proof that he had guessed the young lady's name correctly. He resented Miss Parton's censure, and, with considerable spirit, sprang to the defense of Miss Blake. "Madam, the young lady was quite right in hiring a car for the trip. She will be in Santa Fe hours before she could reach there by train. I am myself in something of a hurry, and that is the reason I chose an automobile instead of the railroad."

The driver of the gray car had got down in the sand and was considering the dilemma and counseling with Hack-

ley. The two stood by the rear wheels, their backs toward Compton; but, as Compton spoke, the driver of the stalled car straightened and half turned. The field agent for the Hercules Six noted the movement out of the corner of his eye, but at the time it held no significance for him.

"Because you make a fool of yourself, young man," said Miss Parton, with refreshing frankness, "is no reason why my niece should do so. Motoring in this country is altogether too uncertain to be depended on in an emergency. I told you that, too, my dear," she added to the girl.

"Yes, I know, auntie," said Miss Blake, "but if this gentleman is kind enough to help us out, we shall still get to Santa Fe long before the train reaches there, and—and we ought to be very grateful."

"My soul, but he's doing a lot to help us," cried Miss Parton, "standing there and staring at you while the precious minutes drag by! If you really think you can get us out of here," she snapped at Compton, "please be quick about it!"

"We'll lose no time," returned Compton stiffly, and directed his gaze at Hackley. "What's the outlook, Spence?"

"We could dig out the wheels, Mr. Compton," Hackley reported, "but we'd have to keep right on doing it till the car got back to solid ground in the road. The easiest way," and here he squinted at the Hercules Six, "would be to hitch a towline to the touring car and start both machines. I reckon that would do the trick."

"You've got a towline?"

"Surest thing you know!" answered Hackley, expanding with pride. "I'm the kind o' man who always goes prepared on a trip like this. Thinking of things, that-a-way, is my long suit."

"Then for Heaven's sake," shrilled Miss Parton, "stop glorying about it and hitch on to this car. Hasn't it got

through your head yet that we're in a hurry?"

Hackley wasn't the kind of man to let a spinster lady find fault with him. He whirled on Miss Parton, and Compton cut in just in time to quench a hot retort.

"Rig the towline, Hackley, and we'll walk the stalled car back into the road."

Hackley and the driver of the touring car went forward to the Hercules Six. While they were getting out the coiled-steel cable and fastening it with rope loops and iron hooks from axle to axle, Compton tried to engage Miss Blake in friendly conversation. "Didn't you and I ride from Los Angeles to Albuquerque on the same train?" he inquired pleasantly, and as though the idea had just occurred to him.

"We did, young man," put in Miss Parton, answering for Miss Blake, "and I told my niece then that I thought you were a drummer. I wonder if you happened to notice," and here the high-pitched voice grew mildly sarcastic, "that we have been staying at the same hotel in Albuquerque for the last three days?"

"Oh, yes, I saw you there!" answered Compton. "I remember, now, that I saw you several times at the Alvarado."

"Let me congratulate you on having a most remarkable memory," said Miss Parton, in a voice at once bland and chilling.

Compton gave up and turned away, saying things to himself. The cable had been made fast to the two cars, and Hackley was climbing into the roadster. The driver for the ladies was also getting into his own machine.

"Are you both ready?" called Compton, taking up a position at one side and midway between the two automobiles.

"I am," said the man in the stalled "six," bearing down on the self-starter with his heel.

Spence Hackley leaned out of the roadster and looked back at Compton.

"Where's our switch plug, Mr. Compton?" he called. "It ain't here."

"I didn't take it," Compton answered.

"Where in Sam Hill has it gone? I can't do a thing without that switch plug!"

"It was right where it ought to be when I got out of the car," Compton averred.

At this point, Miss Tabitha Parton leaned over the tonneau door of the gray machine and cried, in her heckling voice: "Take the extra switch plug out of your pocket and use that!"

"Haven't got any extra plug in my pocket," Hackley answered.

"How strange!" exclaimed the spinster lady, in acid tones. "I thought you were the kind of man who always went prepared."

Compton was near enough to the roadster to hear Hackley's words. He was also near enough to the touring car to get his first square look at the man behind the wind shield.

He had only one eye! Compton's nerves began to tingle. Speculations and suspicions crowded his mind. "Look out for a one-eyed man named Leeper." That was the warning in Hazlett's telegram.

No doubt there were many one-eyed men in New Mexico, and this particular person might not be Leeper. On the other hand, the driver of the gray car had been working around the roadster with Hackley, and the important switch plug was missing.

Compton was impulsive, and it was his nature to act quickly. If he was making a mistake, in the present instance, it would be easy to apologize. Advancing to the stalled machine, he leaned across the door nearest the driver.

"I'll thank you for that plug, Leeper!" said he sharply, his keen eyes on the man's weather-browned face.

"What's the idee?" the other asked. "What in blazes would I want with

your switch plug when you're all ready to haul us out of the sand? Say, you're crazy!"

If ever a face belied the spoken word, this driver's did at that moment. Compton was gifted in the art of reading human feelings from surface indications, and he now felt sure of his ground. Furthermore, the fellow had not denied that his name was Leeper.

"Give up!" Compton ordered sternly, holding out his hand. "Last call, Leeper."

"How can I give up something I ain't got?" flared Leeper. "Are you looking for a row, or——"

His words were broken off abruptly. The hand extended for the switch plug suddenly gripped his collar and pulled him over the fore door. The catch, under the imposed weight, gave way, and Leeper fell and rolled over the running board into the loose sand. Compton dropped down on him with both knees.

Miss Blake screamed. Miss Parton looked on with interest, her emotions under firm control. Hackley came running from the other machine. "What's the ruction about, Mr. Compton?" he asked.

"This fellow took our switch plug," answered Compton.

"It ain't possible!" exclaimed Hackley. "Why should he put our machine out o' business when he was depending on us to snake him back into the road? Be reasonable, Mr. Compton, and—— Well, great glory!"

Compton's hand, sliding into Leeper's trousers pocket, came away with the missing plug. Hackley's argument had been dashed to pieces against a stone wall of fact, and the demonstration left him gasping. Compton leaped to his feet and handed the plug to Hackley.

"Now start the engine," he said; "and you," he added to Leeper, "get back in your car and do what you can to help the ladies out of this sand. No back

talk! I don't know what your game is, Leeper, but it's an underhand scheme of some kind, and I'm going to keep a sharp eye on you."

Leeper, muttering under his breath, regained his seat under the steering wheel. He was plainly in a vicious frame of mind, but Compton's determination had cowed him.

The motors chugged and grunted, the sand flew from the rear wheels, the steel towline grew taut—and the big gray car moved onward into the road.

"You are all right, now," said Compton to Miss Blake, while Hackley was removing the cable.

"Yes, thanks to you," the girl returned. "But there is one thing I want to know," she continued, her voice deliberate and incisive, "and that is why our driver told us his name was Brooks when you call him Leeper. It is a mystery why he should want to cripple your car at the very time you were to help us into the road." The brown eyes swerved to Leeper. "Will you explain?" she asked.

"My name's Brooks, all right," growled the one-eyed man, "and this fresh guy's got it wrong. I haven't an idea how the plug got into my pocket—unless," and he looked darkly at Spence Hackley, "some hombre put it there for reasons of his own."

"You are a dishonest person, Brooks," said Miss Parton calmly; "but your reasons are too mysterious for me to fathom. You were hired to take my niece and myself to Santa Fe as quickly as possible. See that you do it."

"I'll see that he does it," Compton put in. "You'll follow us, Leeper, and keep as close to our roadster as is reasonably safe. If you drop too far behind I shall probably come back and look for you. I've an automatic with me, and if you try any more of your schemes I'll cut loose with some fireworks. Get that straight, will you?"

Compton smiled reassuringly at the

ladies, doffed his cap to them, and went back to his own machine. "You drive, Spence," he said, "for I expect to be busy keeping track of the car behind."

In this manner, the roadster leading and the touring car following at a short distance, the travelers took the hairpin turns of La Bajada grade; and from there on, they reeled off the miles until the Indian school and the State penitentiary bordered their trail near the outskirts of old Santa Fe.

At the edge of the town, the cars parted company. There was no word of farewell to Compton from those in the touring car, and the gray machine faded into a cross street and left the roadster to continue on alone.

"I'll bet she'd have had something to say to me, all right, if the dragoness had given her the chance," Compton remarked to no one in particular.

"How's that?" queried Hackley. "You speakin' to me, Mr. Compton?"

"The best hotel, Hackley," said Compton. "I suppose you know where to find it?"

Hackley drove to the Montezuma, where he left Compton and his baggage, then went on to a garage with the Hercules Six. Compton registered, asked the hotel clerk for information about the curio stores, and started forthwith to attend to the work for Hazlett.

That he was to meet Miss Blake again, he felt positive. Fate was still working on his side—and what mortal may set aside the decrees of destiny?

CHAPTER III.

AN ODD TWIST OF AFFAIRS.

COMPTON, following directions, made his way to a shop under the ancient oxcart, the shop of Candelario, who advertised himself as the only native-born curio dealer in all Santa Fe.

Certainly that was a wonderful shop. It was wide and long and low, and

down its middle were heaped hundreds of rare Navaho blankets. Shelves lining the walls were crowded with the pottery products of native artisans. From the ceiling swung Indian costumes, with pipe-clayed moccasins and leggings and yarn-woven tunics. Amid this Pueblo finery hung bows in buckskin cases, skin quivers with feathered and flint-tipped arrows, headdresses of buffalo horns, wonderful specimens of silver-mounted bridles, saddles of strange pattern, and a thousand and one other examples of barbaric arts and crafts. In cases was displayed Navaho work in beaten silver and Mexican work in spiderlike filigree. Elsewhere were barrel drums, rude tambourines, and sticks with horsetails and skin rattles, all used by the Indians in their religious dances. Compton, however, was interested only in rain gods.

"I'd like to see a rain god, if you please," said he, addressing a pleasant-faced man, who happened to be the famous Candelario himself.

"There," said the latter, and he led Compton to a table filled with sitting clay figures, six inches high, each holding a bucket on its knees. "The Pueblo Indians have gods for everything. There is a god of the sun, of the wind, of love, of murder—what you will. Those are the rain gods. Eastern people often buy them to use as match safes."

"Show me the blue ones, please," Compton requested.

"I am sorry, but there are no blue rain gods."

"I've got to have a blue one," Compton insisted. "Haven't you ever had a blue rain god in stock?"

"Never," answered the curio dealer; "but I can have one of the regular rain gods made over in blue for you."

"That will hardly answer," said Compton. "I'll be in later and buy something. You surely have a wonderful stock—but just now I am in a hurry

to find a Jupiter Pluvius idol in a sky tint."

He walked out of the shop and tried another curio store farther along the same street. There he had no better success than at Candelario's.

"Wonder if Hazlett was misinformed about this blue rain god?" he thought. "He wants something that's off color, and there doesn't seem to be any such thing. I've one more chance—at the shop facing the plaza."

Retracing his steps to the little square, set like a green emerald in the heart of the town, he walked around three sides and came to the place of the curio dealer. The proprietor met him courteously.

"Any blue rain gods to-day?" inquired Compton, feeling very much like a green boy who has been sent from pillar to post in quest of a "round square," or a "glass hammer."

"Well," answered the proprietor, "I did have a blue rain god. It was brought in by an Indian from Tusuqué; but I disposed of it not more than fifteen minutes ago. There appears to be quite a demand for blue rain gods. I'll have to get a lot made up in the new color, just to——"

Compton gasped. "You sold it?" he cried.

"Yes. It was a remarkable specimen, so far as coloring is concerned, and I had it on hand for a couple of weeks. Most rain gods are done in black and red, but this——"

"Did you sell the blue rain god to a person with one eye?" cut in Compton.

The dealer seemed startled; then he smiled. "No, the person who bought the idol had two very good eyes," he answered.

"Describe the man, will you?"

"It was not a man, but a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes, a very beautiful one. She was very eager to secure the blue rain god. She had brown eyes——"

"Brown eyes!" exclaimed Compton.

The curio dealer proceeded with a description that erased every doubt from Compton's mind. Hazlett's coveted rain god had been bought by none other than Miss Meryl Blake! The girl had visited the curio shop in company with another lady, easily identified as Miss Tabitha Parton. Miss Parton had bought a clay vase; but that did not matter just then.

Compton's feelings were more of wonder than of disappointment. He left the curio shop and crossed the street to sit on a bench in the plaza.

Here was an odd twist of affairs. Miss Blake's business in Santa Fe had been the same as Compton's; that is, the securing of the blue rain god. Her aims and designs, at that point, had crossed Hazlett's. For whom had she secured the idol? An answer to this question was beyond Compton. All he could realize was that, but for his efforts in Miss Blake's behalf at Santa Fe Creek, he might even then have had the blue rain god in his possession. Nevertheless, Compton was not sorry to have proved a friend in need to Miss Meryl Blake. What were blue rain gods to him when so fair a girl as Miss Blake was concerned?

He broke off his reflections abruptly. Across the street, striding swiftly in the direction of the curio store, was the tall, lean form of Leeper. The one-eyed man turned briskly in at the shop door.

"He's after the idol himself," thought Compton, and chuckled. "Well, he's fooled. That's something, anyhow. I'm sorry for Hazlett, but I've helped keep Leeper from securing the azure rain bringer. Hazlett ought to be grateful for that."

Presently Leeper reappeared, apparently much cast down. With bowed head and hands clasped at his back, he doubled the side of the square where

stood the long, adobe *palacio* of the ancient governors, now given over to the historical society. Compton watched the tall, bowed form until it vanished around the portico corner.

"Why did Leeper give the name of Brooks," Compton asked himself, puzzled, "and drive the gray touring car for Miss Blake and her aunt? And why did he try to disable our car when we were about to pull the other machine out of the sand? Did he know I was after the blue image? Was that his reason for trying to delay me? To go further, did he hire out to the two ladies for the purpose of delaying them, also? Did he stall the touring car purposely? If this was his motive, what could he hope to gain by his villainous work? He was delaying himself as well as the rest of us. Hanged if this thing doesn't get more and more mysterious the further I delve into it! Why is Hazlett so concerned about a——"

"May I speak with you a moment?"

A soft voice interrupted Compton's tantalizing train of thought. He looked up quickly, and the next instant was on his feet and lifting his cap. "Miss Blake!" he exclaimed delightedly. "It is a pleasure to meet you again. Of course you may speak with me—as long as you like. Won't you sit down?"

The happiness he professed to feel over that unexpected meeting was in no way marred by the small, paper-wrapped parcel Miss Blake held in her hand—a parcel which undoubtedly contained the blue rain god. Another point for congratulation was the fact that Miss Blake was alone.

"I haven't time to sit down, Mr. Compton," said the girl hurriedly. "I saw you here in the plaza while my aunt was doing some shopping and I was waiting for her. I couldn't resist the temptation"—here a flush dyed her face—"of speaking with you, if only for a moment. You know my name?"

"You and your aunt registered at the

Alvarado just before I did," explained Compton, smiling.

"You were very kind to us, back there on the trail to Santa Fe, and as you are the only gentleman in this city whom I know and feel that I can trust, I—I wish to ask a favor of you."

The very thought of granting Miss Blake a favor was highly pleasing to Compton. "I shall be glad to do anything I can for you," said he earnestly.

"On the lapel of your coat," continued the girl, "I see an emblem of the order to which my father belonged. This has had not a little to do in giving me courage to come to you and ask the favor."

"Now," returned Compton, "to the pleasure of serving you is added the fraternal duty I owe your father. Command me."

"If you help me, Mr. Compton," the girl continued, a troubled look in her eyes, "I must warn you it will not be without some danger to yourself."

"The prospect becomes more and more alluring," said Compton gallantly.

"You are more than kind," Miss Blake murmured. "I cannot tell you about the matter now—it would take too long—but I am going to ask you to come to this place at eight this evening." She handed him a card. "Is it asking too much?"

"Certainly not," he answered. "I shall be there promptly at eight."

She rewarded him with an entrancing smile. The next moment, swerving her glance across the street, she started, and her smile faded.

"Aunt Tabitha!" she exclaimed. "I must go at once. Thank you so much, Mr. Compton, for showing all this kindness to a stranger."

"The pleasure is mine, I assure you," he said.

On the opposite side of one of the four streets bounding the plaza, Compton could see Aunt Tabitha walking up and down and peering in every direc-

tion for her niece. Again seating himself on the bench, he watched while the niece crossed the street, joined the aunt, and walked away with her. The two disappeared around a near corner.

Compton was in high good humor. "We're getting acquainted, Miss Blake and I," he said to himself, "and it is this business of Hazlett's and the blue rain god that's bringing it about. I can see where I'm going to enjoy the rest of my two weeks' vacation, right here in old Santa Fe!"

The next moment a feeling of surprise and discomfort ran through him. Miss Blake and her aunt had suddenly reappeared and were coming toward the plaza. The girl seemed reluctant and ill at ease, while Miss Parton, head erect and shoulders squared, walked with a militant and determined air. Entering the plaza, they came directly toward Compton and halted in front of him.

"Mr. Compton—that is your name, is it not?" This from Miss Parton in measured, frosty tones.

"Yes," Compton answered, rising.

"Well," pursued the lady, "I want to inform you that I am quite capable of looking after my niece and safeguarding the business that claims her attention. She has appealed to you, but it was quite unnecessary. You will pay no attention whatever to the request she made. Is that perfectly clear?"

In the girl's brown eyes Compton read a mute appeal. If he interpreted the look correctly, she wished him to let their appointment stand as they had arranged it.

"It is perfectly clear, I think, Miss Parton," Compton answered.

"Then we will not trouble you any further," said Miss Parton, with finality. "Come, Meryl!"

They turned and left the plaza. A second time Compton watched the ladies vanish into the cross street. Leaning against the bench, he gave vent to a low whistle. Then his surprise gave

place to feelings of a different nature as he saw Leeper skulk into sight and take up the trail of Miss Blake and her aunt.

"Aunt Tabitha's request doesn't apply to Leeper, anyhow," thought Compton. "I'm within my rights in keeping an eye on that fellow—and here goes!"

With that, he left the plaza to follow and watch the one-eyed man against whom Hazlett had delivered his warning.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME MISADVENTURES.

LEEPER turned the corner of an adobe building just beyond the post office. Warily Compton turned the same corner. At once an amazing and unexpected situation confronted him. Leeper had vanished utterly, and was nowhere in sight. Miss Parton and her niece, however, were just around the corner, and seemed to be waiting.

The dark eyes of the spinster lady were bright, and her manner forbidding. She stood squarely in the middle of the walk. "May I suggest to you, Mr. Compton," said she frigidly, "that we do not care to be followed and spied upon?"

Compton was taken aback for a moment, but regained his poise quickly. "Pardon me, Miss Parton," he said, with what dignity he could muster, "but I am not following you. The man Leeper—or Brooks, as he gave his name to you—came this way. His actions were suspicious, and I made up my mind to see where he was going. Didn't you see him?" he asked, looking around.

"We did not see him," returned Miss Parton, with a disagreeable significance in her tone. "Good afternoon, Mr. Compton!"

Miss Blake, who stood at a little distance from her aunt, did not look in Compton's direction. The ladies went on; and Compton, greatly disturbed, slipped back around the corner to hide

his discomfiture. "A fine mess I'm making of this!" he growled, in acute self-reproach. "What in thunder became of that slippery, one-eyed chap?"

Leeper had probably escaped observation by way of an opening in the adobe corner wall. This being the case, he had displayed a suddenness and an ingenuity which spoke volumes for his resourcefulness. Compton returned to the hotel, impressed with the fact that he had, in Leeper, an accomplished villain to deal with.

The unfortunate incident of the afternoon did not cause Compton to change his plans for the evening. He had promised Miss Blake that he would serve her, in the business she had in mind, to the best of his ability and in spite of attendant dangers. He intended to keep that promise. The card, tendered him in the plaza, bore the engraved script, "Miss Meryl Blake," and a Chicago address on Lake Shore Drive. Written hastily in pencil, above the name, was this: "Please meet me at eight by the old cathedral."

The girl's confidence in the wearer of an emblem which was worn also and honored by her father brought a thrill of chivalrous pleasure to Compton. Not all the spinster ladies in the world could have come between him and what he believed to be his duty toward Miss Blake.

During the afternoon Compton familiarized himself with the way between the hotel and the ancient church, and shortly before eight he started to keep his appointment. Spence Hackley, who knew the town, volunteered to accompany Compton on his evening ramble, directing his steps toward scenes connected with Santa Fe's exciting history and thus giving point and system to—what Hackley supposed—was a mere sight-seeing excursion. Compton excused himself, however, on the plea that he would look over the old landmarks by day. He was taking merely

a short stroll, he explained, and not in the character of a tourist.

Along Water Street Compton laid his course, plunging into pools of dark between low adobe houses and emerging into the light of electrics on street corners. He avoided main thoroughfares, and presently saw the dark spires of the old church blanketing the stars ahead of him.

He seemed to be alone in the street he was traversing—a street that had once resounded with the tramp of ten and twelve-mule teams and the creaking of great vans arriving by the Old Trail from the distant East. *Baile* and *fandango* flourished in those romantic trading days, and from sober, ruinous houses Compton fancied he could hear the sound of gliding feet, a faint tinkle of guitars, and a dim click of castanets. Soft, Spanish eyes had glowed in that same New Mexican dusk, and Americans from across the plains had lost their hearts before ever they had sold their freighted cargoes.

Under the adventurous spell of the past, Compton's pulse quickened. He felt as though he had been set back nearly a hundred years, into the time of the Mexican domination of the country, when the *gobernador* was almost a prince and the old *palacio* was the seat of power.

But the spell faded into the strident notes of a phonograph, working through the "Ting-a-ling" song from "High Jinks." Compton quickened his pace and growled under his breath as he moved onward. The present had met the past on its native heath and dealt it a smashing blow.

A man whose vocation it is to exploit automobiles has not much chance at romance and adventure in these prosy days. Compton had always felt that he could be both romantic and adventurous if conditions were right, but whenever he braced himself for thrills

something always happened to his environment.

The noisy phonograph was still jingling in his ears when a wild cry went up out of the night. The shrill alarm, plainly in a woman's voice, broke from the distant shadows and crashed through the jumble of sounds from the street side. Compton was brought up short, startled and wondering. A dog barked. Some one raced through the dark in Compton's direction, a cur following with excited yelps.

Compton was confused by the suddenness of the turmoil, but when a man in flight halted to swear and kick at the pursuing dog, the field agent for the Hercules Six began to find himself. Unless Compton was badly mistaken, that lean, shadowy form and the sputtering, profane voice were Leeper's!

Compton jumped and made a grab at the dim figure. A fist plunged into him with great force. His grip relaxed, and he staggered. At the same moment the dog, showing poor discrimination in the night, leaped and took hold of his coat.

Leeper was hurrying on. Compton recovered quickly from the shock of the blow. By that time he was thoroughly aroused, and eager only to come again to handgrips with the one-eyed man. The fellow had been up to something wrong—that seemed certain—and here was a chance to bring him up with a round turn.

Compton shook the dog loose and kicked him away, then went after Leeper at top speed. The fugitive whirled around gloomy corners and hugged the shadows of low buildings in his flight. Every stride carried him toward a part of town where buildings were few and chances of escape correspondingly improved. But Compton gained on him, for Compton had been athletic in his earlier days, and had not lost his ability to sprint.

Presently flight and pursuit drew to a

crisis in a place where a creek bordered one side of the road and a long mud wall the other side. Here, Leeper, panting and worn, turned to meet the man who was almost upon him. They came together fiercely and toppled into the dusty road.

"Compton!" exclaimed Leeper huskily, recognizing his assailant.

"I've caught you red-handed, Leeper!" said Compton. "You're a footpad, eh? A skulking thief!"

He twisted his hands in Leeper's collar as they rolled, pulling the coat around the man's throat. Compton had mastered Leeper once, and believed that he could do it again. But the one-eyed man developed strategy for which Compton was not looking. He kept himself and his antagonist rolling, and in less than a minute had dropped both of them into the creek.

With a loud splash, the two forms hit the water. Compton's gripping fingers relaxed as his head went under, and when he lifted himself, gasping, out of the churning waves he found that Leeper had splashed through to the other side of the creek and was climbing the bank. Before Compton could make another move, his slippery foe had vanished.

The automobile man was drenched to the skin. He grabbed at something on the surface of the creek and succeeded in capturing it. It proved to be his cap. Physically uncomfortable and mentally chagrined, he waded clear of the water and stood, dripping, at the water's edge.

"Here's a fine how-de-do!" he grumbled. "I'd have had that villain on dry land, but when he rolled us into the creek he got his chance. If he's in Santa Fe to-morrow, though, I'll find him!"

Just here, another angle of the situation appealed to Compton. To go on to the old cathedral in his present plight was out of the question. He would have to return to the hotel first and get into

some dry clothing. After that, it would be too late to keep his appointment.

Moodily he made his dripping way up the bank and toward the road. His foot struck against some object which, intuitively, he realized was no common obstacle. He stooped and picked up the object, and sense of touch revealed it to be a small parcel, paper-wrapped and bound with twine.

A thrill shot through Compton's nerves, and eagerly he hurried into the road where the light was better. In size and shape the package he held matched the one he had seen in Miss Blake's hand in the plaza. The blue rain god! Undoubtedly the parcel contained the Indian idol!

A sense of triumph, despite his misadventures, surged through Compton. He chuckled as he brushed the wet hair out of his eyes. Leeper had had the rain god somewhere about him, and had lost it while rolling down the creek bank. The man had escaped, but had left behind him the loot of his evening's foray.

It seemed clear that Leeper, in some way cognizant of the night's plans, had preceded Compton to the ancient church, and had there wrested the blue rain god out of Miss Blake's possession. It was she who had screamed—it must have been! He reasoned that she could not have been hurt, although she must have been tremendously excited. Miss Blake, expecting to meet him, had brought the rain god with her. Compton could not understand her reason for doing that, but probably it had something to do with the favor she was to ask of him. He resolved to find her the next day and return the package. That ought to make capital for him with Aunt Tabitha. If he had Miss Blake's address, he would return the rain god that very night. Perhaps he could find where the ladies were staying and do that yet; but next day, at latest, Miss Blake should have the idol.

It was pretty tough on Hazlett, but Miss Blake surely had first call in the matter of the blue image.

Compton wrung the water out of his cap and blundered on through that strange part of the town until he saw the lights of the plaza and got his bearings; then, realizing what a spectacle he must be, he proceeded as unostentatiously as possible to the hotel.

There were people in the lobby, and he had to pass the scrutiny of their amazed and humorous eyes. Steeling himself for the ordeal, he was hurrying through the office on the way to the stairs and his second-floor room, when a short, stout man gave vent to an exclamation and jumped from a chair. "Compton!" the man cried, in consternation. "What in Heaven's name has happened to you?"

Compton halted and stared. "Hazlett!" he exclaimed, and put out his hand. "I'm wet, that's what's the matter with me. What else could happen to a man who's trailing down a rain god? Come upstairs, Joe. I want a heart-to-heart talk with you."

He slipped his wet arm through Hazlett's and drew his amazed and wondering friend with him toward the second floor.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONTENTS OF THE PARCEL.

WHEN did you get here, Joe?" Compton asked, leading his companion into his room.

"On the night train," was the reply. "I wired you I was coming on at once. Have you found the rain god?"

Compton pushed Hazlett into a chair and switched on the electric light. "Well," he said, "you have dropped in at the psychological moment. I've worked hard for you, and you can see what's happened to me. I'm entitled to an explanation, I guess, before I do any talking myself. While I change my

clothes, Hazlett, you sit right there and tell me about this blue rain god."

"Have you found it, Compton?" asked Hazlett, impatience and eagerness throbbing in his voice and glowing in his face.

"I'm not saying a word," returned Compton firmly, "until you explain why you started me on this fool pursuit of an Indian image."

He dropped the small parcel he was carrying into one side of his opened suit case and began pulling out the dry garments he needed for his physical comfort.

"By George, but you're a sight!" said Hazlett, a crackle of humor in his throaty voice. "Wish I had a snapshot of you as you are this minute! Mighty few of your friends would recognize the Beau Brummel of the automobile business in a picture like——"

"I'm a bit touchy this evening, Joe," interrupted Compton, straightening with a scowl, "and I'd suggest that you sidestep the persiflage. I'm going to take a bath, and while I'm about it you can talk over this idol business through the open door. Very likely there'll be night work ahead for the two of us, but I'll not discuss that until you tell me why you've kicked up such a row about a piece of Pueblo pottery."

Compton vanished inside the bathroom. Hazlett lighted a cigar, waited until the water had been turned off in the tub, and then began his explanations.

"A man named Tolliver Doremus started this business, Compton," he said. "Doremus is an anthropologist, and wrote 'Professor' before his name on the register of the Commercial Hotel in Flagstaff. He's a little, dried-up man with side whiskers, and seemed entirely out of place among the husky mine promoters at Flag. Doremus prospected around, and brought in a lot of stone axes and prehistoric pottery. In the collection was the finest bit of galena

you ever saw in your life. About twenty mining men, all with interests around Oatman, went crazy when they saw that galena. We backed Doremus into a corner and began bidding against each other for an interest in his 'strike.' In two minutes the professor was as crazy as the rest of us, but for a different reason.

"He didn't care a whoop for ore," Hazlett went on, "but he was batty on this subject of prehistoric man; and he had dug up the galena in the exact spot the silt of centuries had engulfed a rare assortment of junk used by New Mexicans about the time the Neanderthal man was crawling into a cave and breathing his last. What excited Doremus was this: If he sold his information regarding the galena, brutal, unsympathetic men would smash the rare specimens of his cache in a headlong hunt for lead and silver. You know as well as I do, Compton, that all the prehistoric stuff in the world isn't worth a single good mine; but you couldn't beat that into the head of Tolliver Doremus.

"The old boy lay awake nights wondering how he could save the relics of a dead-and-gone civilization from the clamoring mine hunters. He wouldn't sell his information about the galena, of course, and he didn't dare go off into the hills and dig up more stone axes for fear he would be followed, and his secret discovered. Doremus was in a hard row of stumps, for a fact, with mining men camped in the hall outside his hotel room, and laying for him by platoons in the hotel office and on the sidewalk out in front. Each one of us had a relief, and kept watch and watch about so that night and day Doremus was looked after. He couldn't leave his room, and his meals had to be brought up and shoved at him through the transom over his door.

"I jumped my bid to twenty-five hundred, by writing it on a piece of paper and hiding it in a sugar bowl. On the

same tray, though, some one else went me five hundred better by means of a mustard bottle. Every time the professor found a new bid in his grub pile, he groaned in agony and worried about the ancient relics. Besieging an anthropologist like that, Comp, is one of the most wearing things you can imagine. Competition was so blamed keen every man of us had to be on the job all the time. I lost ten pounds in three weeks. I guess we'd have been blockading the old 'prof' yet if——"

"Where in Sam Hill does the blue rain god come in?" Compton asked from the bathroom.

"I'm getting to that," Hazlett answered. "In order to lead up logically and convincingly to what happened, you've got to understand the professor's state of mind. What he did was ridiculous, but you must remember that a harassed anthropologist doesn't do things in an ordinary way. Far from it. Doremus had been badgered until he——"

"Rain god, rain god!" shouted an exasperated voice from the bathroom, accompanied by a sound as of some one pounding the floor with a chair. "I want to know about this rain god!"

"Well, listen!" begged Hazlett. "I'm right up to that, Compton. One night, in spite of us, Doremus disappeared. He got out of his second-floor room by tying sheets together and lowering himself from a window. We didn't discover his flight until next morning. Naturally we supposed he had gone to his cache of relics, and all of us mining sharps started men in automobiles and on horses combing the surrounding country. Doremus couldn't be found. Days passed, and the impression prevailed that he had made away with himself in order to escape persecution at the hands of galena-mad enthusiasts in Flag. We were mistaken, though.

"One night, a week after Doremus made his get-away, I was awakened

from a sound sleep by a gentle tapping on my door. I got up, switched on the light, and admitted a worn and frazzled shadow with side whiskers. It was Doremus. You know what he'd done? Why, he'd been away in Santa Fe, and on to Tusuqué—old anthropological hunting grounds of his. In Tusuqué, he had had Ki-ki, who makes the rain gods, fashion one of the images for him and stain it sky blue. On this he had marked his initials, 'T. D.' In the head of the idol he had placed a paper giving the location of the spot where he had found the galena!"

A shout of disgust emanated from the bathroom. "Why should even a crazy professor do a fool thing like that?" asked Compton.

"Well, I gave a thousand dollars to find out," said Hazlett. "Naturally I couldn't give as much as I would for the location of the mine, in black and white, right in my hands, but I did offer a thousand, and the professor almost cried as he took it. He wanted to tie up the hunt for the mine until he had had time to recover the prehistoric remains; and about the only thing he could think of was to start a stampede toward Santa Fe. The blue rain god, marked 'T. D.,' was to be taken into Santa Fe and sold to the curio dealers. That was my only clew, and it cost me a thousand dollars."

Compton, at that moment, emerged from the smaller room, completely dressed save for his shoes, and dropped down in a chair and began to laugh.

"You took the professor's word for all that, did you," he asked, "and paid down a thousand dollars for information concerning this—this blue rain god?"

"Do I look as easy as all that?" asked Hazlett. "I gave Doremus five hundred in cash and an I O U for five hundred more—the paper to be taken up with currency when I found the rain

god and secured the location of the mine."

"Very shrewd, very shrewd, indeed!" remarked Compton. "Where does Leeper come in? You haven't explained that, Hazlett."

"Doremus warned me against Leeper," went on Hazlett. "He said the fellow must have followed him from Flagstaff, and he feared he might have a working knowledge of the blue rain god. That sort of talk got me nervous. I remembered you, and my ride with you to Needles; so I sent that message to Albuquerque. When I get that mine, Compton, I'll give you a slice of it—provided you have been able to annex the idol. Now tell me what success you have had."

"Just a minute, first," said Compton. "You haven't said a word about Miss Meryl Blake, of Chicago. Tell me about her."

Hazlett's eyes widened. He stared. "Miss Meryl Blake, of Chicago?" he echoed. "I never heard of her."

"I firmly believe that she is too sensible to be caught with that fairy tale about the blue rain god," said Compton. "She is not the girl to go crazy over a ledge of galena and squander money on the secret of a Pueblo image. And, anyhow, her aunt, Miss Parton, would not have allowed—"

"Parton?" cut in Hazlett excitedly. "Judge Randall Parton? Say, is he here? Comp, is Judge Parton in Santa Fe?"

"I never heard of Judge Randall Parton," returned Compton. "I'm speaking of Miss Tabitha Parton, the aunt of Miss Blake. Both ladies are in town, Hazlett, and Miss Blake bought the rain god about fifteen minutes before I reached the right curio store."

Hazlett dropped the remains of his cigar and fell back in his chair. "Then I've met my Waterloo," he growled disconsolately, "and am five hundred to the bad. The judge is mixed in this—

the name of Parton is not a coincidence. Parton was as hot on the professor's trail as any of us. But—but how in blazes did he manage to put this over on me? I thought Leeper was the only man I had to fear."

"I think you need a guardian, Joe," observed Compton, with a weary shake of the head. "You had Doremus right where you could get what you wanted from him direct, but you overlooked that important point and made a deal for a pig in a poke. What's happened to you since you left the automobile business?"

"I never overlooked a thing," answered Hazlett warmly. "The professor's idea was to stampede the mining men toward Santa Fe, so he could rifle his cache of the remains of an extinct civilization. Doremus knew I was being watched by all those interested in the galena proposition, and that when I made a move the others would follow. He was clever in laying his plans, all right, but failed to take account of a personal handicap—and the plans missed fire. You don't suppose for a minute that I didn't think of getting the location of the 'strike' directly from him, do you? Well, you're wrong. I offered him twenty-five hundred dollars for a description, to be given on the spot, and guaranteed the safety of his prized relics. I believe he would have accepted the offer, if it had been possible to do so."

"Why wasn't it possible?" inquired Compton skeptically.

"Well, the only written instructions he had for reaching the cache were planted in the idol. Doremus is terribly absent-minded. It suddenly dawned upon him that he had forgotten where the cache was and couldn't remember a thing about it. So he needs the blue rain god as badly as I do. When I find it, and recover the instructions, it's agreed that I shall help him safeguard his prehistoric treasures. Now you've

got the whole of it, Comp. I'd not be running around after a blue idol if it wasn't necessary."

"Mighty strange Doremus became so absent-minded, all at once!" exclaimed Compton.

"I agree with you, but I had to take the case as I found it. Now, tell me what you have been doing," Hazlett begged.

Compton began at Albuquerque; and then he began again on the train out of Barstow, and asked Hazlett if he remembered seeing the charming girl with brown eyes two sections away in their Pullman. Hazlett shook his head. Compton resumed his disclosures, and told of the stalled car by Santa Fe Creek, and of Leeper; of events that had transpired in Santa Fe, finishing with the encounter on the bank of the creek and the finding of the package. Hazlett grew more and more excited as Compton went on.

"Then you have the blue rain god, after all!" he cried delightedly, when his friend had stopped speaking. "Our fortunes are made, old man! We have the blue image, and the whole thing is right in our hands. Was the rain god in the package you dropped into your suit case?"

Hazlett jumped from his chair and started for the suit case. Compton barred his way. "Not so fast, Hazlett," he said. "It's not your rain god, but Miss Blake's. She bought it."

"Bought it!" Hazlett stormed. "How do you make that out? My deal with Doremus establishes my right to the thing."

"I think not, Joe," returned Compton firmly. "I have the idol, but it was stolen from Miss Blake; so I am in duty bound to return it to its rightful owner. You're excited, now. Just calm down and give the matter a little thought."

"And you claim to be a friend of mine!" said Hazlett reproachfully.

"Yes, and I'll make that claim good—but not by using stolen property that happens to fall into my hands. Suppose you and I together return the rain god. State your case to Miss Blake, and perhaps she will hand the image over to you——"

The friends were near a clash, but a diversion was caused at that moment by a knock at the door. Compton answered the summons, and a policeman walked into the room. "Which of you is Compton?" inquired the officer.

"Here," answered the Hercules Six man.

"Then," said the bluecoat crisply, "I'll trouble you for the package you took from a young lady an hour or two ago, over by the old cathedral."

Compton was thunderstruck. "Package I took from a young lady!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Do you mean to call me a thief, officer?"

"If the package contains a blue rain god," was the grim response, "I reckon I'll have to lock you up. Where is it? Where—— Ah," he broke off abruptly, his eyes on Hazlett, "I reckon that's it!" he added. "Anyhow, it tallies with the description."

While Compton was answering the door, Hazlett had taken the package from the suit case—undoubtedly considering himself well within his rights. Passively he yielded the small parcel to the representative of the law, who began removing the string.

"Now, we'll see where we're at," remarked the policeman, unwrapping the paper and spilling some pottery fragments on the coverlet of Compton's bed.

"Broken!" gasped Hazlett, in dismay, staring down at the dull yellow pieces of baked clay; "the blue rain god's smashed, Comp! Where's the head?" he murmured, poking at the litter with an eager forefinger.

The policeman looked at Hazlett in

disgust and at Compton with an air at once apologetic and congratulatory.

"It's not a rain god, it's not blue, and there's no head to it at all," he declared. "Mr. Compton, I'm on the wrong track, and I'm sorry I bothered you. That stuff on the bed was an Injun's idea of a flower vase. Good night, gentlemen. I'll go back and report to Miss Parton."

"Just a moment, officer," interposed Compton grimly. "If you are about to call on Miss Parton, my friend and I will go with you."

"I was to take you to Miss Parton in case you had the blue rain god," demurred the officer; "she reckoned there couldn't be a mistake about it, but somehow there was. I'm sorry if you've got a grouch about what's happened."

"I have no grouch," said Compton, "but I've been placed in a false position and have got to set myself right."

He sank into a chair and began putting on a dry pair of shoes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RAIN GOD COMPANY, LIMITED.

COMPTON was very much at sea. The package, presumably taken by Leeper from Miss Blake and dropped on the creek bank, had not contained the blue rain god, after all. But why had an officer been sent to apprehend him, Compton, as though he were a footpad and a purse snatcher? This was the point that aroused the automobile man's indignation.

The policeman led Compton and Hazlett into De Vargas Street. While following the guardian of the law, the friends discussed recent developments in the rain-god matter. Compton knew very well that Miss Blake had the blue idol. Hazlett took comfort in this thought, in spite of the fact that the situation was otherwise obscured by doubts. For Compton, there was no comfort in any angle of the affair until

he had made it plain to the Chicago girl that he was an honest seller of Hercules Sixes, and not a criminal.

The officer turned in at a pretentious dwelling whose windows were aglow with light. He touched an electric doorbell, and the summons was presently answered by Miss Tabitha Parton herself. "How long does it take you to find a blue rain god and arrest a criminal, officer?" asked the spinster. "It is getting very late, and I thought you'd never come. Bring in your prisoner."

This talk was not to Compton's liking. He pushed after the policeman into the hall of the house and confronted Miss Parton. "If you are referring to me as a criminal, madam," said he sharply, "I wish to tell you that you are in error. I have come here of my own will, and not as a prisoner."

"Mr. Compton," returned the lady, "I do not intend to deal harshly with you, but you have got to make a clean breast of your machinations in the affair of this blue rain god. You followed us and spied upon us this afternoon; and you——"

"I beg your pardon!" interrupted Compton, in protest.

"And you met my niece by the old cathedral at eight this evening," pursued Miss Parton firmly, "and took the blue rain god by force and decamped with it. Do you dare deny these things?"

"Merciful powers!" exclaimed Compton. "Certainly I deny such statements. I——" He glimpsed a figure a little way down the hall, and turned to it in wild appeal. "Miss Blake, you don't think I'm a highwayman, do you?"

"No," answered the girl, coming forward courageously. "I want you to know, Mr. Compton, that I have had nothing to do with the work of the officer. Aunt Tabitha knows I went to the old cathedral to meet you, and that I took the blue rain god with me,

10B

intending to ask you, as a favor, to take care of it until my uncle reached Santa Fe. You see, I had no idea he'd come on so soon. Some one rushed upon me out of the darkness, snatched the package containing the idol, and then rushed away again. It was all done so quickly I could not see who the person was—but I knew it could not possibly be you. I had to tell Aunt Tabitha about it, and in spite of my protests she telephoned the police. I am very, very sorry, Mr. Compton."

There was genuine regret in the brown eyes, and it proved very soothing to Compton. With grim visage and folded arms, Miss Parton stood by and watched and listened. "Tell me this," she said, "did you, or did you not, come to Santa Fe after this blue rain god, Mr. Compton?"

"Why, yes," admitted Compton, "but I did not——"

"I knew it! I was certain of it!" Miss Parton turned to the policeman. "Did he have a package in his possession at the hotel, officer?" she asked.

"He did," was the answer, "only it was——"

"I guess that settles the matter," went on Miss Parton.

"It does not settle the matter," insisted Compton. "I was on my way to the cathedral when I heard some one scream. Leeper rushed past me, I gave pursuit, and we had an encounter. He got away, but he left behind him the package. I picked it up and carried it back to my hotel."

"Ah," said the spinster, in mild derision, "you picked it up and carried it to your hotel! Why did you not at once, and without delay, return it to my niece?"

"It was impossible, at the moment."

"It was impossible, because it did not fall in with your aims and inclinations. In her folly, my niece would have intrusted the rain god to you, for safe-keeping. Had you known her plans,

you could have bided your time and profited by her misplaced confidence. How much did you pay Professor Doremus?"

"I beg pardon?" said Compton, startled.

"You joined the Blue Rain God Association," continued Miss Parton. "How much did it cost you?"

Compton drew a long breath and swerved his eyes to Hazlett. The latter pushed forward. "My name is Hazlett, Miss Parton," he said, "Joseph Hazlett. I have known my friend, Compton, here, for many years, and he is as straight as a string and as fine a chap as you will find anywhere. I sent him a telegram at Albuquerque asking him to get a machine, make a hurried trip to Santa Fe, and pick up the blue rain god for me. I reached town this evening, went to the Montezuma, and waited for Compton to show up. When he arrived, he was wet to the skin—for, in his fight with Leeper, he had rolled into the creek. He had the package, and I claimed it as mine. He would not give it to me, but declared that it belonged to Miss Blake, and that he intended to return it. At that moment the officer arrived and——"

"And took possession of the package!" finished Miss Parton. "Give me the rain god, officer. I have a roomful of gentlemen waiting to look at it. They are all financially interested. You might join us, Hazlett," she added. "Possibly you may hear something to your advantage."

The officer had the pottery fragments folded in the original wrapper. He opened the paper under Miss Parton's eyes. "I was to bring Compton here, ma'am," he said, "in case he had the rain god. But he didn't have it. An Injun vase was in the package, and it was smashed, as you see. There wasn't any blue rain god at all."

Miss Tabitha Parton, for the first time, began to manifest some uncer-

tainty as to Compton's guilt. Miss Blake, as she looked at the broken vase, gave vent to a cry of astonishment. "I know what happened, Aunt Tabitha!" exclaimed the girl.

"So do I," was the grim response. "You may go, officer. I'm glad you brought Mr. Compton, even if you were not following the letter of your instructions."

"I didn't bring him, ma'am," said the officer. "He came of his own accord—to set himself right, as he said. Good night, all," he finished, and left the house, with a shadowy grin playing about his lips.

Miss Blake hurried up a flight of stairs. Miss Parton, beckoning to Compton and Hazlett, moved toward a door from behind which came a muffled sound of voices. She opened the door, and the two friends entered a room in which half a dozen men were seated. All started to their feet.

"Hazlett, by George!" went up the cry. "He's in on this with the rest of us!" and there followed a roar of laughter.

Hazlett was taken aback. After a moment he turned to a stout gentleman who was offering him a cigar. "What's the idea, judge?" he inquired. "What am I in on with the rest of you?"

"Whisper," said the stout gentleman, his eyes twinkling. "We're the Rain God Company, Limited. Each of us here paid Doremus varying amounts, and each of us, as we supposed, bought the sole right to the secret of the blue idol. Clever? Well, say! Doremus started all of us mining men toward Santa Fe, and while we're hunting the rain god and quarreling about our rights, he's rifling the cache of those prehistoric remains. We're stung, Hazlett, but not all is lost. Each of us has a one-seventh interest in the Doremus strike. We've settled it that way, among ourselves. Do you want to make

trouble, or will you take it pleasantly and join us?"

"Doremus sold the secret of the rain god to—to all of you?" asked Hazlett.

"Exactly." Judge Randall Parton beamed. "My sister and niece were in Albuquerque, and I wired my niece to go to Santa Fe as quickly as possible and hunt for the blue rain god. She secured it, but was afraid to keep it. Nick Leeper was around, and hot on the rain god's trail. Meryl was afraid of him, and intended turning the idol over to you for safe-keeping. But Tabitha was clever enough to call that turn! We're expecting the blue rain god any minute, now, and if you'll come in with us, we'll form the company right here and draw up articles of copartnership to-morrow. What do you say?"

"The scoundrel!" gulped Hazlett.

"Of course it was a bit shady, the way Doremus acted," continued the judge, "but maybe we hounded him so he was within his rights in attempting to get back at us. Chet Reeves, there, paid over six hundred, cash; Morton Hays came down with four hundred and an I O U for three hundred more; Bob Rickner dropped seven hundred cold into the professor's palm; Hackamore is out nine hundred, Leversey seven-fifty, and I'm hit for eight hundred. Rather a neat pick-up for Doremus, eh? But if we get a bonanza mine, what's the odds? We'll share and share alike, and work it together. Are you with us?"

"I'll take my medicine with the rest of you," said Hazlett, "but I never thought Doremus was as crooked as all that."

"He played it well, and that's a fact. Tabitha." Here Judge Parton turned to his sister. "Where's the rain god?" he asked.

"It will be here in a minute, Randall," said Miss Parton; then added gratuitously: "Men are mostly fools, and this proves it. No, Randall, I don't

except even you. Lords of creation!" She sniffed. "Thank Heaven there are women enough in the world to correct the mistakes of the men! Ah, here is Meryl!"

Hazlett was introducing Compton as the girl entered with another package—a small parcel almost identical with the one Compton had found on the creek bank.

Miss Parton explained to those present that a man who called himself Brooks, but who was now known to be Leeper, had offered to bring an automobile and take her and her niece to Santa Fe. Unknown to his passengers, Leeper was after the blue rain god himself. His chicanery had failed by a narrow margin, in which a blunder of chance had saved the day for others who were trailing the blue rain god. Miss Blake, fearing the designs of Leeper, had intended placing the idol in Compton's hands for safe-keeping. She planned this in spite of the protests of her aunt. At the time Miss Blake bought the rain god Miss Parton purchased a clay vase. Both were wrapped similarly in the curio store. In going forth to meet Compton, Miss Blake had taken the wrong package. She had now brought the right one. So circumstances had favored the mining men.

"Can you beat that?" cried Judge Parton delightedly. "Leeper is a scoundrel, and we've floored him at his own game. Hazlett, the rest of us took the same train from Flag. You were fortunate enough to get out on an earlier one. En route to Albuquerque, we got together and compared notes. Our train did not connect at the junction for Santa Fe, so we got off at Albuquerque, hired a big automobile, and came directly here. And good luck, by a mistake of Meryl's, has been with us! Two packages—and she picked the wrong one! Most remarkable, I must say. See what's in the

head of that image, Tabitha," he finished.

Miss Parton had opened the parcel, and a blue idol stood revealed. "It is marked 'T. D.,'" said she, and showed the initials to the excited mining men.

She broke the clay figure by striking it against a table. The head, in pieces, dropped on the carpet; and among the pieces lay a folded paper. The men from Flagstaff crowded around the judge while he picked up the small scrap and opened it out.

Only two in the room seemed to have little interest in what was going on. These were Compton and Miss Blake. They had withdrawn to a couple of chairs in one corner, and were chatting on subjects that had nothing to do with galena or rain gods.

A tremor ran through Judge Randall as he adjusted his glasses and read the message on the crumpled scrap. His face hardened, his limbs grew rigid, and he looked ominously about him over the tops of his spectacles.

"Read it aloud, judge!" came a chorus of voices.

"Then, gentlemen," said the judge dryly, "prepare yourselves for a shock. Here's what I find. Listen:

"Thanks for your contributions. The piece of galena came from a mine in Montana, and the prehistoric relics from a museum in Arizona. You were easy. I will now subscribe myself with the name by which you know me, but which is not my own, Professor Tolliver Doremus."

The only sound that broke the stillness was a shrill laugh from Miss Tabitha Parton.

CHAPTER VII.

DEMONSTRATIONS IN ORDER.

NO mine!" gasped Chet Reeves; "no strike at all, but just a plain double cross!"

"A swindle!" cried Hackamore. "I'd give another nine hundred just to have my hands on Doremus for one minute!"

"Can't we keep this quiet?" asked Bob Rickner. "I wouldn't have it get out in Flag for a thousand dollars!"

Leversey, too chagrined for words, set his heel on the fragments of the blue rain god and ground them into the carpet.

"And you claim to be business men!" said Miss Parton, flinging out her hands in a gesture that expressed the sarcasm that throbbed in her high-pitched voice. "Suppose some one were to come to me and say there was a white elephant in San Francisco with the Ko-hi-noor concealed in a howdah on the elephant's back. Well, if I paid a few hundred dollars for the secret and went hunting the elephant, I'd let myself down to the level of you men who have been trailing the blue rain god. A normal woman is altogether too smart to be hooked by such folderol. Why did you go hunting the blue idol at all? Why didn't you insist on having this Doremus write you off a description of his strike on the spot?" There was a jeer in her voice as she demanded: "Did any of you think of that? Randall, I blush for the Partons!"

"Tabitha," said the judge sadly, "Doremus told me he wanted to get the mining men away so he could work at his cache unmolested. The idea you mention did occur to me, but it wouldn't work."

"I thought of it, too," put in Hazlett, "but it was blue rain god or nothing. Doremus said I was being watched, and that all the other mining men would stampede on my trail when they found out where I had gone."

"Doremus put it differently to me," remarked Hackamore plaintively. "He said his only written record of the cache had been placed in the head of the blue rain god, and that he was absent-minded and had forgotten the location. I was to wire him as soon as I got the image, and allow him to secure his stone and pottery relics unhindered. He——"

A ring at the door interrupted the speaker. Miss Parton answered the call, and presently returned ushering in a policeman with a handcuffed prisoner. The prisoner was Leeper. A roar went up from the Flagstaff men.

"Chance continues to favor you, gentlemen," said Miss Parton. "Leeper was trying to get his automobile out of the garage when a waiting officer arrested him. No violence, please. Leeper has been victimized, I think, like the rest of you."

"Now you've said a lot," spoke up Leeper, a baleful light in his good eye. "I paid two hundred dollars in cash to find out about the blue rain god. My information was secured several hours ahead of yours, judge. I hopped a train for Albuquerque, and was in a garage in that town dickering for a machine to take me to Santa Fe when Miss Parton called up and wanted a car for the same trip. I suspected she might be related to Randall Parton, and that he had wired her to get the idol. So I told the proprietor of the garage that I'd drive the lady to Santa Fe, and he could have the toll.

"We got stuck in the sand at Santa Fe Creek, then along came Compton. From something he said I figured it that he was after the idol, too. So I took his switch plug and tried to strand him, trusting to luck to work the touring car out of the sand. But he called me. In Santa Fe, I ran around to the curio stores. The last one I went into was the right one. A girl answering Miss Blake's description had beaten me to it. I was up a tree for fair, and was loafing around and trying to figure out my next move, when I saw Miss Parton and Miss Blake making for home. I started to follow them and find where they stayed; but, by a chance, I saw Compton trailing me. I ducked through a door, threw Compton off my track, and picked up the two ladies again on the other side of the block.

"After spotting this house in De Vargas Street, I laid low and watched it, hoping I might see a way to get in and make off with the rain god. Toward eight that evening, Miss Blake came out with a little package in her hand. I reckoned that package contained what I wanted, and I moved along after her. Close to the cathedral, I made a rush, grabbed the package, and hustled away into the dark. Then, next I knew, Compton was right after me. We came together, and I got clear of him by rolling into the creek. After I had made my get-away, I discovered that the package had been lost from under my coat. That settled my case, and I tried to leave town in the car. Nothing doing. This man in blue got hold of me."

Something like appeal arose in the single eye as Leeper added: "We've all been bunkoed, Miss Parton says. So why lay anything up against me? I'm two hundred out, along with railroad fare, automobile hire, and other expenses and trouble. Haven't I had enough without you fellows piling it on?"

"Will you keep quiet about the affair, Leeper, if you're allowed to go?" Rickner asked.

"Quiet? That's my cue. Have I got anything to brag about? I'm sorry, Miss Blake, if I was rough; but I was crazy, like all the rest of these galena chasers."

"Do not be hard on him, officer," begged Miss Blake, "because of the way he took that package."

"Let him go," supplemented Judge Randall Parton. "He's a villain, but we'll have to air this whole affair if we put him through."

"Leeper," said Miss Parton, "the only thing I have against you is the way your questionable actions inspired my suspicions of Mr. Compton. Release him, officer, and let him leave town. You were watching for him at my re-

quest, but when I made the request I did not know how deeply he was involved in what happened. I withdraw my complaint."

The officer nodded, removed the handcuffs, and led Leeper from the room and out of the house. Miss Parton again addressed the Flagstaff contingent.

"You are all coming out of this much better than you think," said she, "and much better than you deserve. Randall, read this to your friends."

The judge took a telegram from his sister, glanced at it, became excited, and then read the message aloud:

"MISS TABITHA PARTON, *Sante Fe, New Mexico.*

"Tolliver Doremus arrested this morning when about to leave Flagstaff. Your information correct. His real name is Oliver Ames, otherwise Mason Slidell, and he is wanted in Toledo, Ohio, for a confidence game. Am holding him here.

"HARCOURT, Chief of Police, Flagstaff."

This telegram was received with loud applause by the mining men. But when the exultation had died away, wonder began to show itself. How had Miss Parton been able to order the arrest of the confidence man by wire, in time to get the police busy before his escape from Flagstaff?

"Randall," Miss Parton explained, "sent my niece a long telegram at Albuquerque. He stated that he had bought, from one Professor Tolliver Doremus, a certain mining secret that had to do with a blue idol in some one of the curio stores at Santa Fe. Well," and here a look of annoyance crossed the sharp features of the spinster, "I had bought a supposedly rare vase from Tolliver Doremus. This happened several months ago. He needed money, and agreed to let me have the vase for a song. A week after Doremus left, I invited a connoisseur from New York to look at my vase, and he pronounced it a very poor imitation of the real thing and worth about two dollars. I placed

the matter in the hands of the police, but as time passed and Doremus was not apprehended, I lost hope of ever getting even with him."

"I'm surprised at you, Tabitha!" exclaimed the judge. "How much did you lose?"

"Never mind how much I lost," said Miss Parton sharply; "and if I did get caught, Randall, I have been sharp enough to turn the tables on the swindler. He used the same name in Arizona that he used in Ohio, and your telegram gave me the proper clew. I telegraphed the chief of police at Flagstaff and asked him to look after Tolliver Doremus. When you and your friends collect from the fellow on your own account, I will ask you to collect two hundred and fifty dollars for me."

"We are greatly indebted to you, Miss Parton," said Leversey.

"Don't let that trouble you," answered the spinster. "Mr. Compton!" she called.

Compton left the side of Miss Blake and drew near Miss Parton.

"You were trying to do the right thing, after all," said the lady. "Where is your place of business, Mr. Compton?"

"Detroit," he answered. "I am field agent for the Hercules Six, the best automobile manufactured. It is not an assembled car, but is all built under one roof and——"

"After you get back to Detroit," cut in Miss Parton, "drive a Hercules Six over to Toledo and give me a demonstration. If I like the car I'll buy it."

"I'll put the matter in the hands of our Toledo agent, Miss Parton. You see——"

"My niece will be visiting me for two months, just after we get back from this trip, so please have your agent look me up at once."

"After all," said Compton, "I believe I had better handle this matter myself. I'll bring the car in person."

Miss Tabitha smiled wisely and wistfully. No business of moment had resulted from the affair of the blue rain

god, but a romance seemed likely to spring out of it. This Miss Tabitha knew, and was seemingly content.

Riders of the Plains

A THOUSAND trained roughriders in Canada preserve order in that part of British North America lying west of the Great Lakes, an area almost as big as Europe. This force has administered justice in a region infested, at first, by hostile and marauding bands of Indians; in a region visited later by some of the most troublesome white men on the continent; in a region peopled still later by immigrants from practically every other part of the world; and finally in a region affected during the present war by the native prejudices and passions of these immigrants; and through each and every period it has administered justice impartially and unfailingly. Five hundred men added, as a precautionary measure, at the outbreak of hostilities, were not long continued in the service, because the normal force was sufficient. Most of the released five hundred have since joined the oversea forces; some are performing useful service at home.

It has often been asked, How does it happen that the Royal Northwest Mounted Police are so successful in maintaining order over so great a stretch of territory? We have the answer in the report of the operations of the force for last year. Here is that answer: In thirty-two cases of capital crime committed in the prairie provinces during the twelve months of 1915, the principals, in thirty-one instances, were overtaken. The principal in the thirty-second instance will not be permitted to rest until he, also, is brought in, if he is to be found anywhere between the international boundary and the arctic circle. It is fundamental with the mounted-police service of Can-

ada that no culprit shall be allowed to escape. The fugitive is pursued relentlessly, whether in the crowded city or among the desolations that bend from the height of land to the north pole.

Recently, because of the growing settlement of Canada in the west and the organization of local police, there was some talk of disbanding Canada's famous mounted force, but it did not get very far before it was stopped by a general protest. It was very quickly and satisfactorily pointed out that in some parts of the United States there was a decided movement toward State constabulary of much the same order, and that western Canada would long have employment for a force supplemental to municipal police, and mobile enough for service anywhere from the Red River to the Pacific, from the border to Yukon and Hudson Bay.

The "riders of the plains," as the Canadian police are sometimes romantically called, came into existence forty-two years ago. From the beginning, the force has been as attractive to adventurous young men from all parts of the world as was the cowboy service of the great Southwest of the United States in its palmiest days. Not long ago an inquiring visitor found in the ranks Western bronchobusters, Eastern loggers, lumberjacks, cockneys, Scots, "time-expired" men, side by side with French Canadians, and graduates from Dublin and Oxford. Younger sons of noble British houses have served with "Canada's Finest," and it is recalled that a son of Charles Dickens did honorable service in the ranks and was proud of his experience. C. S. M.

The Reason Why

By C. Kryz Wright

YES, I'm crying just like a baby,
And I'll tell you the reason why:
I want to go back to the old farm,
And live with my soul till I die.

I'm tired of this luxury livin',
And being society's tool;
I want to roll in the timothy field,
And splash in the crystal pool.

Yes; roll, get down on the dirty ground,
And wallow, and bask in the sun.
To get up when the day is waking,
And work with God till it's done;

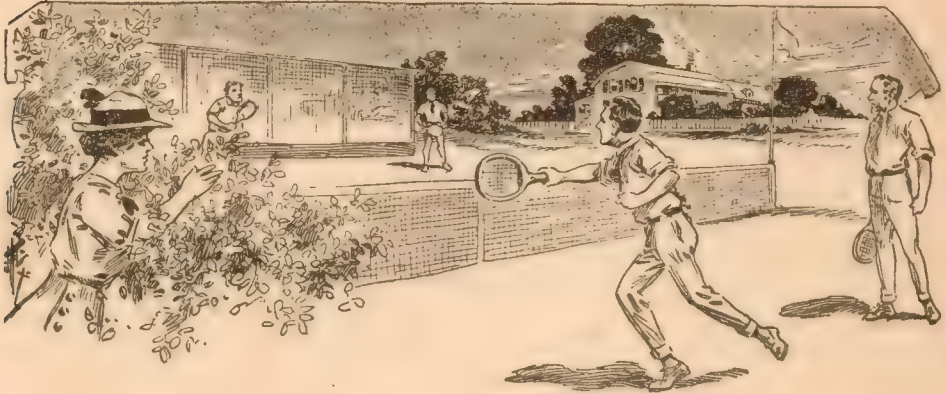
Bring in the oats, and to stack the wheat,
And feed the chickens and pigs;
Give Bossy her fodder, and curry the horse,
And ride into town in farm rigs.

To go when it's warm to the little stream,
And see how my ducklings fare;
Or shinny up trees in my overalls,
And never notice a tear.

But, no; I must stay in a stuffy house,
Full of everything gold can buy;
And do whatever society says,
And do it without a sigh.

And so I cry like a baby,
Now you know the reason why.
I want to go back to the old farm,
And live with my soul till I die.

Over the Net- *By* Frances Wilson.



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

STUBBORNLY ALOOF.

FOUR men, in the baggy, soft-shod ease of tennis attire, sent the balls tirelessly back and forth, pausing occasionally to mop their brows in joint tribute to the exercise and to the ardor of the June sun.

Keenly interested, Natica Wilder looked on. In the usual course of events she would not have been spending the summer quietly with her mother's cousin in the old Dutch manor house mellowed by the memory of many bygone Van Schaacks; nor would she have found there, where she expected a summer filled with memories and dreams, four men that her practiced eye instantly perceived to belong to the genus interesting. And certainly it was anything but usual for four individuals of their sex and social qualifications to behave to her as they had done.

When, upon her arrival, a month earlier, her cousin had rather nervously announced the presence of the quartet,

Miss Wilder had received it with an agreeable stir of anticipation.

"Do these young men board with you, Cousin Lisbeth?" she had asked.

Mrs. Merwin, born Van Schaack, quailed perceptibly at this brutal directness. It might be very well to call a spade a spade, but she drew the line at calling a boarder a boarder; and her manner as she replied was a marvel of gentle dignity.

"No Van Schaack has ever taken boarders, my dear," she said firmly. "Three years ago I was persuaded, greatly against my will, to receive these gentlemen into my family as guests—paying guests," she added, rather consciously.

"They now seem like sons or younger brothers," she went on, more smoothly, "and I should really miss them if they did not come. They seem to love the old place as much as I do."

As Miss Wilder recalled this scrap of conversation, and compared her anticipation with the reality, she indulged in a little frown of puzzlement and chagrin, for the paying guests had, in

truth, behaved in an extraordinary manner. Instead of showing that taste for her society which she expected as a natural right from all men, they had remained stubbornly aloof. Though they showed her always a punctilious courtesy, it was of the sort that said, as plainly as words: "Thus far and no farther."

"They act as if they had drawn a circle around their sacred forms," she mused jeeringly. "I am taboo. There's no doubt about that. But why? I've always supposed I was rather nice."

The answer to this question came a few days later, in a most unexpected manner. A bit of conversation which she overheard resulted in her complete enlightenment.

So that was it! They didn't want a girl about. They wanted their summer all to themselves; the wretches, and actually thought her a spoilsport and looked upon themselves as martyrs. As one of them had brazenly put it, they wanted "God's sweet country, a rattling game of tennis, and nothing more."

"Eternal vigilance is the price of masculine liberty," said a voice that she recognized as Halwyn's. He was evidently addressing Dick Suffern, otherwise dubbed "the Cub." "Don't you go to listening to the song of the siren, young man," he went on, in a bullying tone. "The lady'll get you if you don't look out. Nice little boys like you aren't safe."

"Well, I just want you fellows to know that I feel low-down," she heard the Cub retort and then she passed deliberately from the blameless attitude of accidental listening to the deplorable one of deliberate eavesdropping without a qualm.

"We all feel low-down," she heard next, in the suave tones of Stanway, who in point of years was, next to Halwyn, the eldest of the group. "That's just what we have against her. She makes one feel like that unpleasant

quadruped that wears bristles. And what right has she to do that, I'd like to know?" he ended virtuously.

"An inalienable prehistoric right," murmured the eavesdropper, with a suppressed laugh, and then fell to listening again, not wishing to lose a word of so illuminating a conversation.

"Yes, young un, what right has she to do it—to come here to Mrs. Merwin's——"

"Ours — right — discovery," interpolated Kingsley the taciturn, who articulated in much the same way that an unskilled chauffeur runs a car.

"Yes, as King says, ours by right of discovery, taken in the sacred names of celibacy and tennis—what right, I say, has she to come here?"

She heard an amused chuckle, and something that sounded like a disgusted "Shut up!" from the Cub; then Halwyn's calm, judicial voice:

"We cannot enjoy a little innocent game of tennis now," he drawled, in an injured voice, "without being conscious that there's a lady with reproachful eyes sitting in the hammock. Gentlemen, we must be firm. United we stand; divided, there's no telling what might happen. Why, she might even ask us to teach her tennis next. And I don't see myself playing girl tennis—not if I know it."

"Indeed!" thought the eavesdropper, with indignation. "Well, if you don't need a lesson!" she said to herself hotly. "And I think I'll endeavor to administer it."

CHAPTER II.

LIKE A SCOTCH MIST.

IT must be said, in justification of the Cub, that he did not realize precisely what was happening in the days that followed, for the song of the siren takes various forms, though it is always unchangeably sweet.

Miss Wilder's manner, erstwhile as

politely indifferent as the manner of the paying guests was guarded, now underwent a change so far as young Suffern was concerned, and he began to regard himself with the quickened interest that comes of finding that another has discovered in us golden qualities only vaguely suspected, if suspected at all. There was a new maturity in his manner, a new aplomb in his speech. He was the man who had found himself, who had discovered in life new meanings and a new poetry in a country June.

Something of this fine new confidence, this sense of being a man of destiny, he one evening confided to Miss Wilder in the velvety gloom of the porch, and a freakish dimple danced about the corner of that young woman's charming mouth. "Don't you ever find it dull, you four men, all by yourselves?" she asked.

"Beastly!" was the fervent reply.

"I sometimes wish I played tennis! But, of course, you wouldn't want to play with a beginner, and I couldn't think of asking you to." Her voice was full of patient resignation.

With a splendid rashness, the Cub, who was aware of a growing defiance toward his friends, insisted that it would be the delight of his life to teach her; that he hadn't suggested it before because—because—well to tell the truth, because living alone with a lot of other fellows made one a bit selfish.

So Halwyn and Stanway, arriving clannishly the next afternoon, were confronted by the unwelcome spectacle of the youngest member of their brotherhood painstakingly initiating Miss Wilder into the intricacies of tennis.

"And, by Jove, she has my racket!" exclaimed the outraged Halwyn, in whose estimation a racket was as invincibly personal as a toothbrush. "To think that after we've nursed that young serpent in our——"

"New York apartment," supplied Stanway feelingly.

"And brought him out to pick the daisies——"

"And drink milk," chimed in his sympathetic companion.

"He would do us up like this!"

The Cub, looking toward them as Miss Wilder stooped to pick up a ball, found two pairs of clenched fists wrathfully threatening him. The lady, however, glancing in the same direction a moment later, saw nothing but two grave and dignified gentlemen, who lifted their hats with profound deference as they entered the house.

"Well, she's broken in," observed Halwyn grimly, as they mounted the stairs; but at his friend's reply he forgot that grievance in a new and fearful suspicion.

"Rather fetching eyes, Hal—did you ever happen to notice? They remind me of a Scotch mist," was what he said.

"The deuce they do!" was Halwyn's ungracious rejoinder.

When the Cub tried to slink into his room to dress for dinner, he found his vague intention of avoiding his friends foiled. Each of the other doors stood slightly ajar, and before he could reach his room and bar them out they were upon him.

"You've done it, you have!" snorted Halwyn. "Do you realize what we're in for now? Nice little girlish games with Miss Gray Eyes, while one of us ornaments the surrounding turf. You're a nice one, you are!"

"Why," burst out Kingsley, with unprecedented volubility, 'do you realize what you've done, boy?' He paused for a full minute, and then went on solemnly: "You've exposed every one of us to matrimony! Mark my words, one of us will be married before he knows it. And there's no telling—I may be the victim," he finished, in a tone of gloomy foreboding.

But the Cub came back at them with

unexpected spirit. "You fellows disgust me," was his lofty retort. "I hope I have the manners of a gentleman. Some of us ought to have." And no amount of ballyragging could turn him from his course.

He not only played tennis with Miss Wilder, who proved but a dull pupil, but he walked with her, rowed with her on the dreaming river, and sat beside her hammock, reveling in that vast, new consciousness of his own significance which her companionship invariably bestowed.

"And the score?" queried Halwyn of Miss Wilder, as he met the two leaving the tennis court one day. There was a delicate irony in his tone that caused the dimple to flash into transient view.

"Fifteen, love," was the answer; and if there had been irony in the question there was mockery in the reply.

"Why doesn't she take some one her own size?" growled Halwyn subsequently. "We're big enough and old enough to take care of ourselves. But the Cub—good Lord! Didn't we promise his mother to look after him?"

"We certainly did," rejoined Stanway thoughtfully. "I'll tell you what, Hal; I think I'll just get into the game myself. Some one ought to create a diversion."

Halwyn, who was walking up and down the room with his pipe in his mouth, sent a sharp glance toward the speaker, but made no direct answer. He did, however, remark in a disagreeably didactic manner that Diana the Huntress is merely the type of all womanhood, leaving Stanway to accept the observation as a warning or not, as he saw fit.

Presently a startled exclamation broke the silence of the room. It came from Halwyn, who was gazing from the window with an expression of complete amazement.

"Well, I'll be darned!" he said softly. "Come here, Stan!"

Stanway joined him, giving vent to a long, low whistle at the sight that met his eyes. "Old King!" he uttered bewilderedly—"King, who never says boo to any girl. King playing the gallant, and seeming to enjoy it, too!"

"Gad, Hal"—there was a ring of real admiration in his voice—"Miss Gray Eyes certainly knows her business. She is a sportswoman par excellence, our Diana. But what becomes of the Cub?"

As a matter of fact, young Suffern's feelings had brimmed over a week previously. It had suddenly been borne in upon him that life without Miss Wilder would be as dull as a cloudy day, and he had told her so. Whereupon that young lady's eyes had become so entirely matter of fact that the Cub winked in astonishment at the transformation.

"Dick, how old are you?" she asked.

The Cub looked sullen. He was unutterably weary of references to his years, and in the present instance it seemed particularly shocking taste.

"There," she continued calmly, "your opinion of me has changed already. You're shocked that such a question should come into my mind at such a moment. And it proves, my dear boy, just what I want you to know: I am *years*"—the stress that she put upon the noun gave it the value of a lifetime—"older than you are. I'm nearly twenty-eight."

"I should love you if you were fifty," was the vehement answer.

The gray eyes were bent upon him very kindly and a trifle uneasily. Momentarily the ardor of twenty-one is convincing, and she was wondering with inward quaking whether by chance the Cub could be of that dreadful sort that loves but once for all time. But a moment's study of his face reassured her.

"Very well," she bargained; "I won't

ask you to wait that long. I'll promise to listen to you if by the last week in August I'm not able to win four games of tennis out of a set."

"That's just another way of saying yes," was the amused reply.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Don't be too sure. And remember, we're chums. No sentiment allowed."

When, later, she announced her intention of trying a few games with Mr. Kingsley, the Cub became gloomy. He watched their play with the growing conviction that the game of tennis was not the only game being played upon that court.

Indeed, he rather shared Halwyn's conviction that the tennis court might now be more properly called a court of love, but there was nothing to do but wait. If the growing intimacy between Miss Wilder and Kingsley made him writhe, he at least had the satisfaction of observing that she made no more progress with her new instructor than with himself. Her lack of skill was almost incredible.

Halwyn and Stanway now spent many patient half hours ornamenting the turf, their soft hats pulled over their eyes, their knees clasped close, waiting for a chance to play, just as the former had predicted they would have to do.

During such times Stanway had an opportunity to study the common enemy to some purpose. Her eyes were like a Scotch mist. "You and I don't seem to be worth the chase," he remarked to his companion as they took their places, the other three having strolled off toward the river. "She does it with her eyes. She's got the Cub, and she's got Kingsley. Ever notice how her eyes sometimes laugh at a fellow when the mist lifts?"

"Play!" snorted Halwyn, in disgust.

But, nevertheless, similar thoughts were running in his own mind. And the irony in his tone was a trifle more

obvious when, finding himself beside Miss Wilder for a moment that evening, he once more demanded the score.

"Thirty, love," was the answer, as her eyes rested upon Kingsley, who was at that moment approaching them. And then the gray eyes came back to Halwyn with a glance impersonal and inscrutable enough to have done justice to the Sphinx.

CHAPTER III.

THE EYES OF THE SPHINX.

ONE by one the July days had been put away in time's great storehouse, and the summer had attained its voluptuous August maturity. A great coppery moon, that had the effect of a huge, jolly face scattering the gloom with its beaming smile, had peered cautiously over the dark tree-tops, and, finding all well, cast discretion to the winds and climbed brazenly into full view.

Halwyn, the forsaken, who had followed his usual custom of withdrawing to his room after dinner, was so impressed by its genial, knowing air that he could not refrain from a facetious "Have a smoke, old man?" as he refilled his pipe. He may have imagined it, but he had a distinct impression that the jolly man in the moon gave him a wink, which meant that he had promised the lady—whose youthful, wistful face many mortals have seen—to give up the habit. But, at any rate, Halwyn smoked on alone, but with a growing desire for companionship.

At last he knocked the ashes from his pipe and laid it on the mantelshelf. Then he stretched and yawned. Then he hummed a snatch of an opera, and the words that matched the strain were: "I love thee not, and if I love thee——" Then he opened the door and descended the stairs. "Where's everybody?" he inquired of Mrs. Merwin, whose generous form he descried in the shadow.

That lady shook her head helplessly. "I think they're all moonstruck," she answered bewilderedly. "The last I saw of them they danced off, holding hands and with wreaths on their heads. 'Playing pagan,' Natica called it. To my mind, it was more like playing maniac," she concluded confidentially. "And Mr. Stanway was the gayest of the lot."

Her listener was seized by an unfriendly, unreasonable desire to thump Stanway. Such trivial behavior was bad enough for twenty and thirty—designating the Cub and Kingsley—but for thirty-nine it was nothing short of scandalous. Amazing that Stanway could be such a silly ass!

"Natica insisted upon their asking you," Mrs. Merwin resumed, "but Mr. Kingsley said you had an important law case on your mind, and Mr. Stanway thought you had a touch of rheumatism."

"The——" began Halwyn explosively. "Hounds—curs—sneaks!" he finished under his breath, while Mrs. Merwin, whose little rill of talk trickled placidly on, was saying:

"But I suppose young people must have their nonsense. Do you ever look back, Mr. Halwyn, and think of your young days?"

Halwyn almost jumped from the chair into which he had thrown himself. Was the woman mad? His young days, indeed—and he but two years Stanway's senior, and Stanway was classed with the young folks! He replied rather stiffly; and Mrs. Merwin, kind soul, reflected that it was a shame for such a man to be allowed to fall into the grumpy habits of bachelorhood.

When taxed with their perfidy, Stanway and Kingsley behaved with shameless effrontery, while the Cub sat in ecstatic silence. "Did it for your good, old man," emitted Kingsley between puffs. "Prevaricated to save you."

"Yes, Billy," chimed in Stanway; "I made up my mind that I'd save you from the danger that lies in that girl's society, if I did it at the risk of my own safety. And now do you appreciate it? Not on your life!" And he took refuge in a bitterness too deep for words.

Miss Wilder, meanwhile, was experiencing the perfect serenity that comes from achievements. Often when she was alone the little dimple came and went mischievously, and it was only at rare intervals that a frown rumbled her brow, and a faint, troubled expression came into the eyes that Stanway declared like a Scotch mist.

"Nonsense!" she burst out impatiently on one such occasion, when her better self seemed to be looking her fixedly in the eye with an expression denoting amazement and reproach—it was after a little interview with Kingsley, in which she had been obliged to stop him rather hurriedly by telling him playfully that she couldn't listen to anything of that sort while she was distracted trying to learn tennis. In the last week of August, if he could beat her four games out of a set—a shrug and a smile finished the sentence, and Kingsley looked as indulgently amused as the Cub had before him.

"Nonsense!" She scowled at the better self as if it had been an actual presence. "Don't men get their noses, ribs, and collar bones broken every year at football? There's an element of danger in every game that's worth playing. Broken hearts don't happen once a century. And if they did—well, perhaps the game is worth it." With this, her better self had to be content.

"You couldn't be induced to play a game with me?" she questioned, as Stanway emerged from the house in his tennis clothes, a few days later. The dimple flickered wickedly, the gray eyes smiled.

"There's nothing in the world I

should like better," he answered warmly, just as Halwyn, racket in hand, appeared in the doorway.

There was no denying the fact that Stanway was going the way the others had gone. The single-handed game between Miss Wilder and the Cub, which had become a three-handed game when Kingsley was gathered in, now became the four-handed game usual on the court earlier in the summer. Only now it was Halwyn, lover of man tennis, who sat dejectedly on the grass and looked on, instead of a girl with reproachful eyes.

The rôle of spectator enabled him to observe several things. For instance, that a halo of wind-blown, dark hair gave a touch of mystery to Miss Wilder's face, and that there was something enticingly graceful in the swirl of a properly cut tennis skirt. This involuntary tribute to the enemy only made his mumbled reply to Stanway's grinning offer to allow him to play in his stead the more biting.

"When Diana hunts," he snapped, "wise men take to cover."

He had to admit, however, that in this particular case the precaution seemed unnecessary. If Diana hunted, she at least hunted other game.

"You haven't told me your score lately," he remarked urbanely to Miss Wilder. "How does it stand, now that you are playing with Stanway?"

Miss Wilder bestowed a long, enigmatical glance upon him. "Perhaps you can guess," she threw out at last.

"I should hazard forty, love."

"You evidently don't think that I'm improving."

"I think you are so skillful that you have no need to improve," was his handsome rejoinder.

Here the conversation flagged, though they still continued to communicate by glances. It suddenly occurred to Halwyn that they had conversed a good deal in that subtle manner, usually to

his mystification. "You have the eyes of the Sphinx."

He had never intended to say it, but it was out before he realized it, and to his relief she passed the remark by as if too intent upon another line of thought to heed it. "Aren't you tired of playing alone?" She smiled.

"Haven't you a somewhat abnormal taste for collecting scalps?" was his counter query, and there for a time their mutual catechism ended. But to Stanway subsequently she announced that Mr. Halwyn was a woman hater, or at least he didn't like her. The fervor of his reply caused a warning "Remember!" to drop from her lips.

"But it's such a ridiculous test, little girl," he protested. "You couldn't beat me at tennis in a thousand years. You're not the athletic type." The little girl smiled and held her peace.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENED.

THE days came and went, finding Halwyn ever more morose. They were not the good old days of do-as-you-please masculine liberty that had made Mrs. Merwin's a charmed place. Tennis was demoralized; the bachelor cohorts routed. But Miss Wilder managed them remarkably well. Halwyn smiled grimly as he remembered how well.

And then, from their talk, he learned of the approaching contest, in which Miss Wilder was to meet her three victims successively. "Victim" was the word that he used, but none of the trio would have acknowledged it.

The day of the joust, as they laughingly called it, had arrived. The Cub, ruddy and reeking with an importance that had in it a touch of mystery that set Kingsley to thinking, was the first contestant.

At the end of the opening game, in which Natica's wild balls kept the two

onlookers dodging, the whim which had staked anything on this mock contest seemed to each of the three men more than ever absurd. The Cub's manner became absolutely proprietary, while Kingsley and Stanway wondered vaguely how the other fellows would take it.

And then suddenly something happened. The dimple went out of commission, and the Scotch mistiness in Miss Wilder's eyes gave place to a keen, spirited look that seemed to bespeak the intention to do or die. From the moment that the second game began to its end she seemed to be conscious of just one thing in the wide world: the game of tennis that she was playing.

As for the Cub, he felt as if he had suddenly landed in the midst of a tornado. Over the net came the balls, falling so close that his arm was almost strained from the socket in his effort to reach them.

"Play up, play up!" jeered Stanway, chuckling gleefully at the Cub's surprise and confusion. But a moment later his face sobered. He perceived that this was no chance luck on the lady's part.

"That's the real thing," said Kingsley; "but, I say—where did she learn it?"

"Yes, where did she?" echoed Stanway; and then a slow, sickly grin stole slowly over both faces.

His first amazement over, young Sufferin' "played up" to the very best of his ability. But, though in subsequent games he somewhat retrieved his fortune, Miss Wilder won five games out of a set.

"You haven't played fair," he said hotly, when at last he got a word with her alone. "You've been fooling me all this time. Pretending not to know tennis—you! Why, you might be a champion——"

He broke off abruptly. "Natica Wilder!" The name brought up some vague association. Natica Wilder!

And then suddenly he remembered, and, in spite of his chagrin, laughed immoderately. And he, who was only an amateur of modest attainments, had been trying to teach her! He gazed at her, torn between admiration and anger.

"You never asked me whether I played tennis," began Miss Wilder defensively, "and, besides, you weren't exactly cordial, you know. I had to do something for the honor of my sex."

She put her hand on his arm with a little motherly air.

"Now don't be cross, there's a dear. You only imagined that you were in love with me because—well, it was June and I was the only girl in sight. Forgive and forget."

The dimple came out just here and made the forgiveness certain, though the Cub gloomily insisted that forgetting was an entirely different matter.

"Why did you challenge the other two?" he demanded suddenly, his ruffled feelings somewhat soothed. And, though Miss Wilder did not reply to his question, he laughed long and loud.

Kingsley, whose turn came on the following day, fared somewhat better, and with Stanway, still later, the game was nip and tuck. But in both cases Miss Wilder won her four games, covering her opponents with a chagrin which they manfully tried to conceal.

And the Cub, who had kept his own counsel, looked on with a grin that absolutely refused to "come off." At the periodical spasms of mirth that seized him, Halwyn, who had wandered over to the court to see Miss Wilder's suddenly acquired skill, eyed him curiously. "You seem to be hysterical," he observed, with his customary dryness.

The Cub returned his glance with something very like pity. "You probably think that you're observing a game of tennis," was his astute reply. "Well, you are, and a mighty good one. But just let me tell you something: that's

not the only game that's been going on all this time."

With this enigmatical remark, he turned his attention to the players, leaving Halwyn to his own thoughts, which ran somewhat in this wise: "Bagged them, every one. Neat work, by Jove! Wouldn't have supposed she could do it. Unless I miss my guess, these games decide something. By Jove, I believe I could beat her! Like to try, anyway. But wherever did she get that form? Can't understand it."

A howl of joy from the Cub interrupted his musings. Stanway, chagrin and perhaps a trace of some deeper feeling in his face, was proffering his racket to the victor with a low bow. The girl laughingly refused it. Then she held out her hands to him and Kingsley.

"I haven't been a bit of a gentleman," she confessed. She would have said more, but Halwyn, who had a lonely sense of being on the outer edge of things, had approached the little group, and as Miss Wilder's eyes met his the Sphinxlike quality of their glance stirred afresh. For the rest, he only knew that a moment later he was bowing low before her in mock humility, declaring himself a knight-errant and craving the privilege of entering the tourney on the same conditions given those other knights whom he beheld worsted.

At his words the faces of his three friends took on an apoplectic hue, and as their startled eyes momentarily sought each other, the truth, sometime suspected by the Cub, flashed upon all three. Here was Halwyn the discreet, who advised all men to take to cover when Diana hunted, begging to be admitted on the same terms. Even Miss Wilder laughed rather hysterically, but the Cub noticed a faint color under the clear white of her skin. He had never seen her blush before.

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"You know not what you ask, Sir Knight," she said.

"But still I ask it," he persisted, and, somewhat reluctantly, his request was granted and the match arranged for the next day.

CHAPTER V.

IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

MISS WILDER passed a wakeful night, and looked a trifle paler than usual when she took her place on the court. She had been adjured by the other three to "do old Billy up brown" for their sakes. Some way she felt that she would be less a gentleman than ever if she did not do so, but she by no means felt her usual confidence. He played a better game than they, and, moreover, he would be intent on punishing her for the teasing part she had played so long.

"Play!"

His warning cry rang out ominously. She wished she had not been tempted into this struggle with him; wished—she hardly had time to know what, for the balls were being smashed over the net in a way that left no more time for thought of any kind.

With the opening game her nervousness passed, and at the end of the fifth the score stood two for her and three for Halwyn. It she could only win and make it a tie!

The sixth was a remarkably even game. First one and then the other scored, but it was noticeable that as Miss Wilder called "Forty-thirty!" her voice held a note of uncertainty. She was again losing confidence. And almost immediately Halwyn's crisp voice sounded: "Deuce!"

"Vantage!" There was a little ring of triumph in her voice, but almost immediately another imperturbable "Deuce!" robbed her of her brief triumph.

The sun dropped suddenly down into that underworld where people absurdly

yawn and greet the coming day as we prepare for the night.

"Vantage!" called Halwyn.

At the same instant, Mrs. Merwin's despairing voice reached them. "Dinner in five minutes, and it takes you so long to get out of those tennis clothes!" was her wail. The three spectators rose reluctantly, just as Miss Wilder missed a ball and Halwyn quietly scored game.

There was a flurry of talk and laughter, and the group moved toward the house. The twilight was deepening as swiftly as if a gray down were being sifted from the sky and Halwyn's eyes shone in the twilight. "To the victor——" he began tentatively.

The dimple danced into view. "If the gallant knight knew what the others played for," remarked its owner, "he might not be so insistent."

But apparently the gallant knight must have divined, for a little later he might have been heard whispering: "And, after all, Miss Sphinx, I guessed your secret."

At the same moment, Mrs. Merwin's voice, now almost tearful, once more reached them: "Natica! Mr. Halwyn! Where are you? Dinner is served."

"Just one thing," he urged hurriedly, as they made a feint of quickening their steps: "So long as you were hunting, why did you never hunt me?"

There was a burst of laughter, and then a stifled voice said: "Silly! One hunts different sorts in different ways."

Clever Dogs

ONE of the most interesting of the subsidiary establishments of the French army is that of the French sheep dogs, which are being employed in ambulance and patrol work. There are only about twenty-five, but their value is generally recognized.

The dogs are of five breeds—Malinois, Groendael, Bar Rouge, Briare, and Berfer Allemand—of which the last is

said to be the least intelligent. The original idea was that they should be employed only on ambulance work, but it was soon found possible to use them for taking back messages from advanced parties to the rear.

Training has to be begun when the dogs are very young. The first thing, of course, is implicit obedience. Then it is a question of training them not to fear gunfire. Once trained, they show themselves absolutely fearless, and so far from recoiling from a shell burst, they usually rush forward and bark furiously at it.

On ambulance work they perform much the same duties as those of the St. Bernard. They are sent out to scour the ground, and when they have found a wounded man they bring back some article of his apparel. A doctor and two orderlies are then detailed to follow the dog, which takes them to the place where the wounded man is lying.

Curious Superstitions

THE Japanese have many curious superstitions about animals, the chief among which is their belief in the supernatural power of foxes. There are numberless shrines, indeed, dedicated to foxes in Japan.

The badger is another animal feared by the superstitious Japanese mind. It is believed to have power to annoy people and to be able to turn into a priest at will.

The crying of weasels and the baying of dogs are considered evil omens, and such insignificant happenings send a shudder over the believers.

In Japan, a light-colored mouse in the house is a sign of happiness. If a spider falls from the ceiling in the morning it brings pleasure, but if at night it is thought to be very unlucky. To see a centipede at night means happiness in Japan.



Beneath the Sparkling Turban

by *Alan Fox*

IN their way home to New York after a hunting trip in East Africa, Ralph Kenyon and his friend Harrison reached Cairo, Egypt, intending to stay only a few hours and then proceed on the home journey. While sitting in Shepherd's Hotel, they were surprised to meet Grace van Moren, the daughter of their old friend, Professor van Moren, an archæologist. They believed the professor and his daughter to be hundreds of miles in the interior studying ancient ruins. The two young men were more than pleased to run across the splendid New York girl—especially Harrison, who was in love with her.

Twelve years earlier, Miss van Moren told them, her father had taken her to live in Persia, where he was making special studies. She was then a child, and her playmate was a little Persian girl named Milna Darassan. When the Van Morens returned to America, Grace persuaded her father to take Milna along. Milna was sent to school and Vassar College, and in a few years became a thorough American girl.

When the professor decided to re-

turn to Persia with his daughter, they took Milna with them.

Two weeks before, Miss van Moren said, Milna heard that her mother, who was supposed to have died years before, was alive in the inland city of Astrabad. Milna was eager to go and make sure, and, seeing no danger in the trip, the Van Morens allowed her to set out in charge of two dragomen. Then came a cablegram, which stated that Milna had been captured by the Jurgis tribe.

Their trip home forgotten, Kenyon and Harrison at once made arrangements for the adventure. In the evening, with Miss van Moren, they left Cairo on a trans-Caspian boat, and in the morning landed at a little coast village, ready to journey overland to the mysterious city of Astrabad. At the village, they engaged as a guide a strange-looking man named Gaklen.

Arriving safely at Astrabad—Grace now disguised as a Persian woman—Gaklen took them to the house of one Ben Mullek, an Arab coffee seller. Gaklen went out to the bazaars in search of information. In the evening he returned with the news that he had found and talked with one of Milna's

dragomen who had fled when attacked by the Jurgis band. The man did not know where they had taken the girl. Milna had given the man her ring, which he was to carry to Professor van Moren as a token of her plight. Gaklen produced the ring, and Grace at once recognized it as Milna's.

Early in the morning, Kenyon hastily left Astrabad on a clew of his own—he was following a Kurdish tribesman he had seen talking with Gaklen.

The trail led Kenyon straight to the Jurgis camp in the hills. From his place of concealment among the rocks, he recognized Milna from Grace's description. The unsuspecting Jurgis was letting her wander about the encampment.

Kenyon managed to attract her attention, and she climbed up to his hiding place without being observed. In their hasty interview, Kenyon was irresistibly drawn to the frail, beautiful, childlike girl. She saw no hope in any rescue plan. The Jurgis were too powerful, she said, and added that that very night she was to be sold to the great Jurgis chief, Elbek Khan, and her marriage to him celebrated the following night.

Unable to think of any plan, Kenyon, in helpless rage, from his hiding place watched Elbek Khan ride in that evening and saw the betrothal ceremony. Toward morning he fell asleep, and awoke to find Gaklen sitting beside him. Quickly covering him with his revolver, Kenyon made the man admit his treachery, and that he himself had engineered Milna's capture. Kenyon then forced Gaklen to start for Astrabad with a message to Harrison.

Then Jurgis horsemen suddenly ambushed themselves around the glade in which the camp lay. The reason was soon clear, for into the glade rode Harrison, Grace, Ben Mullek, and a big Kurd whom Kenyon had seen in Mullek's shop. Harrison had evidently become alarmed at Kenyon's continued

absence and set out in search, forcing or bribing Ben Mullek and the Kurd to guide him. The Arab had led the way straight into the Jurgis' ambush. Turn where he would, Harrison looked into leveled rifle barrels, while Kenyon watched helplessly from the rocks above.

In his own words Kenyon tells of the scene that followed when the meaning of the leveled rifles dawned on Harrison and he realized the grim situation.

CHAPTER IX.

From Behind Black Walls.

THE expression on Harrison's face when he heard the hoofs of the Jurgis band on the rocks behind him and turned to realize the manner in which he and Grace and their two captives had been trapped was one I shall always remember. Grace van Moren's memory will always be green with me for her behavior. She looked, gasped, then put her hand on Harrison's arm and began to laugh. Not a hysterical laugh, but one of real amusement. Not one sign of fear on her part, though she must have known that her fate was now one worse than death for a girl of her race and breeding. She made a splendid pretense of seeing only the humor of it.

Elbek Nadir Rustam Khan waited not on ceremony. He was well accustomed to raiding methods and to conducting captures. For a thousand years they had been the leading sport of his people. Almost as if they were drilled, the riders closed around the party, advanced with them to the center of the camp, dismounted them, relieved them of their valuables, and turned their horses loose with their own.

The Kurd, still bound, was left standing to one side. Harrison and the coffee seller were left at limited liberty, and when he had examined Grace precisely as he had done Milna, the only

difference being that Grace laughed in his face, the Jurgis chief led her toward Melkora's tent. An instant after she entered there was a joyful cry from behind the black walls. I knew that the two girls were in each other's arms, and if Grace had tears, they fell while she was there.

Elbek Nadir Rustam Khan made a slow survey of the precipitous walls that inclosed the place, detailed guards to the upper and lower entrances to the gorges, and then addressed himself to Harrison and the coffee vender. Doubtless he was pointing out the futility of attempting an escape. The Astrabad man endeavored to interpret to Harrison, who stood with such a helpless air that I could not forego dropping my head out of sight and whistling a bird-like call which we had used when hunting in Africa. Peering through the grass, I could see that he had heard, and after turning about for a time, pretending to inspect the barbaric camp, he looked up and answered.

For an instant I showed my face, and he looked wonderfully relieved. If he had known how helpless I was, how precarious was my own position, I doubt if he would have drawn much comfort from the knowledge that I was alive, free, and close at hand. With Gaklen galloping on a useless mission to Astrabad, I and my pistol were all that intervened between the captives and their captors' unchecked will.

Just then some one called the chief's attention to the giant Kurd standing passively by the rivulet beyond the cooking fire. Elbek Nadir Rustam Khan strode toward him, drew his curved blade, and swung it back for a clean stroke to send the fellow's head to the ground when a call from Melkora in the doorway stopped him. They exchanged a few words, and then he cut the Kurd's bonds and began questioning him, but elicited little information apparently. At last he called two of his

men and turned the prisoner over to them to guard.

It was with delight that I perceived Melkora had communicated her warning about the blocked passes to the young chief, for there were no preparations for departure, though the afternoon was then well advanced.

The thought that Grace and Harrison were with Milna at least left me a sense of freedom to attempt some independent action in behalf of all three, no matter how futile it might seem, and I thought desperately. It might not be impossible to make an effort to escape by way of the cleft after night-fall, and I decided to explore the ground. Moving carefully away from my hiding place, I followed the little stream for some two hundred yards along the shelf of the mountain and came to another precipice very thickly wooded about the base.

It was a hard ledge of rock some fifty feet in height. The thickness of the undergrowth prevented easy passage north or south. Where the stream fell over the brink was a loose pile of rocks. I saw that by mounting these I could gain a jutting boulder and work my way to the top. When I reached the boulder I found it loose and so nicely balanced that a little effort would send it crashing down. However, by care, I reached the top, and was pleased to see that for more than a half mile in either direction this cliff extended and was for the most part higher than at the point where I had ascended. The rocks were nearly bare at this elevation, being swept clear of soil by the heavy rains.

I had not gone far before, to my amazement, I came upon a road, one glance at which was sufficient to show me that it was now unused, and I had not gone many hundred yards along it before I saw that it circled the mountain peak and led off to the south. A half mile farther, it rounded a sheer shoulder. It was cut from the rock and

buttressed by excellent masonry, evidently many hundreds of years old. In that region of dead empires where every valley and every hill has some memorial of Persian, Greek, or Mongol civilization, I had come upon a lost and forgotten highway.

About two miles from the point where I had entered it, I rounded another spur and found myself looking down on the workings of some ancient quarry. By this time my blood was at fever heat and my weariness and hunger were forgotten. I could see that the road wound away in the direction of—Meshed.

A daring plan came to my mind. It would be folly to attempt an escape to Astrabad. Even the town would be no safe retreat, but if we could get out of the encampment that night, mount the second cliff, then let the boulder roll down, neither horse nor man could follow us save by a long detour. Once we gained the ancient road, we could travel all night and reach some hamlet on the road to Meshed where we could obtain mounts and so proceed toward the holy city. It would take the Jurgis a day or two to locate us and get in pursuit. It was a desperate chance, but our only one.

The moment I had my plan I sped back at my top pace, for the sun was getting low. It gratified me to note, as I recrossed the balanced boulder, that if it bore my weight, it would sustain each of the others, one at a time, for even Harrison was lighter than I.

When I was again in my hidden point of vantage, I realized how faint I was for lack of food. I did not want to risk trying to get any by the cord. The camp was quiet. Harrison was sitting on a stone by the rivulet. Despite the air of calm over the place, a little observation convinced me that every one was on the alert.

The big Kurd was bound to a tree some fifty yards from Melkora's tent,

and the chief was questioning him and now and then lashing him with a Turkoman driver's whip. The poor fellow evidently knew nothing to tell, and at last the young brute desisted.

When the sun was down and the women, after serving the evening meal from the cooking pots, had withdrawn, I saw the night guards go to the relief of the men posted at the entrances to the camp, then all was quiet.

I was down the cleft the very first minute that I thought it was safe and crept into the dark shadows behind Melkora's tent. I could hear her conversing with Grace and Milna, and a half hour was wasted in waiting till she went out in front of the tent.

Almost afraid to speak, I called Milna's name. With a low, stirring rustle, she came and made me out at once. She stepped quickly to my side, and rapidly I told her the plan. I would get word to Harrison. She and Grace must creep out as soon as Melkora was asleep. They must prepare as well as they could for a long journey, and must bring some food of any sort obtainable.

Melkora's voice asking for her sounded from the tent, and, with a quick touch of her hand, she left me and went within.

Carefully, — cautiously, I crossed around the tent, working my way on hands and knees until I was behind the boulder on which Harrison still sat.

At my low call he started and half rose.

"Sit down, you fool, and listen!" I whispered. I laid my pistol and knife where he could pick them up, told him what the girls were to do, and that he should see that they passed safely into the cleft if he had to fight the whole camp hand to hand.

With the same care that I had advanced, I retreated, and was about to dart for the cleft when the coffee seller came from the direction of the tents, and I heard him explain that he and

Harrison were to sleep together, and that the chief said they were to turn in at once.

This was a complication I had not foreseen; but I had hardly time to realize what it might mean when I saw three figures issuing from the back of the tent. When they struck the light I saw they were Grace, Milna, and—Melkora! The old woman must have been taken into their confidence; she was going with them! Straight into the cleft they passed, and the coffee vender's eyes nearly shot from his head; but he understood, and, at a sign from Harrison, followed the three women.

Then occurred something that raised one man forever to a high pinnacle in my estimation. Harrison arose, sauntered over, picked up the knife and pistol, and, walking slowly down by the Kurd, cut his bonds covertly, but boldly, leaving the Kurd standing motionless, as if still tied; then he sauntered calmly on in view of fully forty pairs of eyes, if they had been attentive, came back, and, picking up the cooking pot in which the greatest amount of food had been left, moved at a leisurely pace toward the cleft. One quickened step would have attracted attention to him, but he was well up the bowlders before the Kurd, who had been watching for the proper moment, bounded from his station, and, with mighty, running strides, came toward me.

A chorus of wild yells echoed through the encampment. Pistols and rifles cracked. Bullets tore through Melkora's tent, whistled over my head as I gained the cleft, and spattered against the face of the cliff. At the top was Harrison. He held out the pot to me, saying:

"Whistle when the women are safely up."

I seized the Kurd by the arm and dragged him ahead. He knew not what the move meant, but it was a chance of escape, and he had darted for the spot

where he saw the man that had cut his bonds disappear.

Brave, clever little Milna led Grace up the pile of bowlders. Grace was holding a lighted earthenware lamp of lambs' fat—Milna's forethought, I knew. She was now guiding and aiding Melkora's ponderous climbing.

High above the noise, Harrison's pistol began to bark down the cleft, and I heard one cry of pain, then another. In a twinkling, all of us were up, I remaining just above the loose boulder. "Set the lamp down and get back out of the way of the bullets!" I called.

The Kurd understood the necessity, if not the command, and, carrying the pot of food, led the rush for the road.

Harrison came on the run as I whistled, and not a hundred feet behind him a veritable torrent of Jurgis pounded up the cleft, but their very crowding was their undoing. The leaders stumbled and fell, and in a moment there was a wriggling, writhing mass of gypsy humanity—a formidable heap of kicking legs and waving arms. Harrison came up like a monkey, but when he struck the boulder he threw his weight on it in the wrong place, and it toppled over. I knew what that meant, and I made one wild clutch for his arm. Luckily I caught it and dragged him over the edge to safety.

The Jurgis had untangled themselves and were up and firing, but as I hauled the last of Harrison over the edge the boulder gathered its momentum and went crashing down into their midst. I kicked the lamp over the brink, and we sped after the fugitives.

With wild cries and useless shots, the remaining Jurgis ramped over the stones and through the undergrowth below. In the darkness, they could find no way to mount, and in ten minutes we were so far down the ancient road that even the sounds of the pursuit had been lost, all save a faint shout or shot now and then.

Then I was sorry that I had been so hasty in disposing of the lamp, for the darkness was a great handicap to speed. Melkora was the first to cry for a halt. We slackened the pace and went on more slowly till Grace was forced to admit that she must rest.

Choosing a little glen by its deeper shadows, we built a fire of sticks, and then set about, organizing the flight properly. The Kurd had been whipped unmercifully by the Jurgis chieftain, and was suffering a good deal of pain, so we took the pot from him and arranged to have Harrison and Ben Mullek carry it on a pole between them.

From a heavy scarf that Melkorà had thrown over her shoulders, quite as if she were bent on a neighborly call, I made a sling for the quantity of bread which the girls had brought. The Kurd and I were the only ones who had not eaten, and we ate together quite like old friends.

It was a queer party indeed. Ben Mullek was very bitter against the Jurgis and very loyal to Harrison, who had evidently treated him well. Melkora, having Elbek Nadir Rustam Khan's gold and silver in a cloth around her ample waist and fearing an attack from the Bujnurd Kurds, had been anxious to escape from camp, and had that day said to Milna that if she knew of any way they could leave safely she would try to reach Meshed at once.

The Kurd, who had been the enemy of all of us, was glad to get away with his life, and was now sure that he owed it to us. I told Milna to talk to him and win him wholly to our side.

After half an hour's rest we moved on again, and had to go very carefully, for I had not been over that ground. The big Kurd noticed this, and by a series of translations to Melkora, Milna, and finally to me, he conveyed the information that he was accustomed to night traveling over mountain roads, and volunteered to take the lead.

After he had been in advance for about an hour the Kurd called to us to halt. We were on the brink of some sort of a precipice, and the sound of rushing water came from far below. Hunt as we would, we could not find a continuance of the road. Apparently we had walked into a trap of our own choosing.

CHAPTER X.

THROUGH TRIBAL HILLS.

THE coming of dawn showed us an unwelcome state of affairs. The builders of the road had cut into the rock at this point to win a passageway around a crag that bordered a very narrow chasm. A rock slide had occurred above, and fully two hundred feet of the road had been swept away. From the point of breakage we could look down three hundred feet to the boiling torrent below. It was about twenty feet to the other side of the crevasse at the narrowest point, and there a ledge projected.

We saw that if we could reach that ledge we could skirt the wall of rock and make our way down to a point several hundred yards below, where the road, winding down to the level of the stream, reappeared. But there was no way to cross that chasm. Bidding the party wait, the Kurd and I retraced our steps to see if we could find some other means. In a quarter of a mile there was none, and we were just topping a rise on the next spur to look back over the perilous way we had passed when the Kurd clutched my arm and pointed.

On the road to the north, some three miles away, something was moving. The Kurd's eyes were better than mine, but even I could see that they were men and animals. The Jurgis had found some way to gain the road, and were riding hard to overtake us. The worst of it was, they saw *us*, for there was a brandishing of arms, and some one fired a shot in the air.

We were in the most deadly peril, and a wild plan entered my mind. I had been the broad-jump point winner at Princeton, and could do twenty-three feet in training, but weary as I was, and cumbered by my clothes, I knew I must fall far short of that. There was no time to lose. Back we ran to the group. It was a downhill sprint, and as I neared the chasm the impulse to try the leap then—that very minute—was strong upon me. Measuring the distance as I sped and gathering all the momentum I could, I picked my departing point, and the one where I hoped to land. As I hurled myself in the air I heard the women cry out. There was an instant's sense of the awful abyss below, and then I struck—almost landing safely—and my body went crashing down on the sharp ledge while instinctively I flung out my arms and tried to cling. There was a red rush before my eyes; then I realized that I had stopped slipping down.

"Steady, old man, steady!" I heard Harrison calling.

Milna was praying aloud as I grappled for my life and theirs. My finger tips found a little fissure, the toes of my boots dug on the little knobs of the face of the cliff, and slowly I drew myself up onto the ledge and lay prone till my head cleared and my heart was restored to its normal condition.

"Buckle your belts and ammunition bands together!" I cried, tossing my own across to Harrison. The stout, English-made accouterments I knew would stand the strain. When all were together the line was just too short, but Melkora's long, silk scarf in which I had been carrying the food was all that was needed. I then tossed over the wooden bobbin on which was wound the tent-sewing thread, holding the end on my own side. Then Harrison threw the bobbin back to me, making a double thread across the chasm to draw back the line of belts.

Once I had the end of the line, Milna, as the lightest, was told to thrust her head and shoulders through one of the belts, and slowly we passed her over. Every instant I dreaded to see the scarf part, but it was native woven and as strong as wire. Next came Grace, and then the coffee vender, as I was afraid to attempt to support Melkora's weight alone. When she was safely over it was a choice between Harrison and the Kurd as to which should be last. With the last the process would be far more dangerous. I sent the women on down the ledge, for momentarily I expected to hear the pounding of hoofs on the rocks up the road. To my amazement the Kurd refused to take the preference, refused stubbornly. Harrison was forced to cross at once. All the food except that in the pot was tossed over and caught.

Then the courageous giant, making the line as secure about his body as possible while we three held the other end and braced ourselves for the shock, eased himself over the brink and swung heavily against our side. We drew him up to safety, but he was limp. He had struck his head against the face of the rock, and was stunned.

Over the top of the rise, we could hear the riders. I confess that for a moment I was tempted to abandon him, but he had shown his mettle, so Harrison and I caught him up over our shoulders, while Ben Mullek carried the food and belts. Down that treacherous shelf we trotted and ran, stumbled and fell, sometimes dragging the unconscious Kurd as if he had been a sack of meal, and just as the Jurgis reined up at the brink we gained the lower level.

They must surely see us when we crossed to the road, for the pot on the brink made them certain we had crossed there. They might be sure we had not plunged into the abyss, and they would be watching for us. Filling the magazine of my pistol and holding

two filled clips in the other hand, I led the way, watching over my shoulder for the first point where the two parties must come in view of each other.

The Kurd was now able to keep his feet. Waiting a moment till he had fully regained his senses, I left him and Harrison to pilot the party over the ford. Crouching behind a rock, I looked out. Six of the band, among them the detestable Elbek Nadir Rustam Khan, were in plain view on their horses. They were studying the situation, probably wondering how we had effected the passage, if we had effected it. Perhaps they thought we had turned back and were hiding among the rocks.

I left them in no doubt. The distance was about a hundred yards, and, taking careful aim, I put nine steel-jacketed bullets into the group as quick as the automatic would work. The execution was all I could ask for. The chief's horse sank to its knees and rolled over the brink, but the Jurgis threw himself from the saddle and escaped. Two of the men plunged headlong, one carried over by his falling horse, and then, before I could refill my magazine, the spot was bare.

Our retreat thus was covered perfectly. All, even I, were over the stream and had gained the road before their rifles began to crack around the corner of the cliff. Another nine shots silenced these, and in one more minute we were under cover of the rocks down the gorge.

Ben Mullek had been looking up the gorge, cursing and making threatening gestures. That was truly Oriental, now that the little affair was over. But something seemed to be really bothering the Kurd. He was tenderly caressing his sore head and talking with Melkora. Now both advanced toward us and called on Milna to translate. She listened, and then put out her hand to Harrison and looked up to me.

"He says that you two are the bravest

and boldest men he has ever seen, and you have saved his life twice. He is your slave henceforth, and will never leave you."

I might have been touched if Harrison had not remarked gravely: "Ken—if we ever get back to Broadway I'll play you a game of pool to see which of us keeps him; for, as matters now look," and he glanced meaningly at Milna, "our happy and otherwise days of teamwork are over."

We were free now from immediate pursuit; so, choosing a favored spot, we made a fire and breakfasted. It gave me some little concern to see how mountain air and small battles before breakfast improved appetites, but there was enough left for another twenty-four hours, and in that time we could surely reach the hamlets of the lower country.

Toward evening we came to a place where the road divided. One branch turned east into the heart of the hills without any conceivable destination, the other followed a cañon down into the valleys, and this we chose.

We camped for the night beside the brawling stream, mounting a one-man guard, and in the morning pressed on without further adventure. All of us were footsore, and Melkora was nearly exhausted. The more I saw of her the better I liked her. She was very intelligent, very kindly, very sagacious, and her unexpected devotion to Milna would have won me under any circumstances.

About ten o'clock, when we were far to the east of Astrabad and of the location of the Jurgis encampment, the road suddenly terminated. It had been cut into a rocky defile, and by some freak of nature a considerable stream had turned down this channel, washing the road wholly away in course of time. There was nothing to do but follow the stream. We came out into the open plateau of the great salt desert before nightfall and lodged in an old robat, deserted save for two wild, shy shep-

herds who were so impressed with the strange make-up of our party that they seemed to have lost their tongues altogether, and simply sat and stared till they fell asleep.

About ten o'clock the next morning we reached the old caravan road to Meshed, coming out in the other direction at Astrabad. When I went over the matter with Melkora and Ben Mulek we found we had made a phenomenal journey both as to distance and time.

There were evidences that a large party had halted at the adobe guest house the previous night. It was set apart from the scattered adobe, hay-piled houses of the wild hamlet, and we studied the ground carefully. Both horses and camels had been in the caravan, but no slow-moving donkeys. While we were pondering the matter, Grace brought me something she had found. It was a brass clip from an auto-load Remington.

Instantly my mind reverted to Gaklen. Auto-load Remingtons being scarce in that country, it did not require much thought to figure out what had happened. Gaklen had obtained my rifles and armed a party of his own. Knowing him as I now did, there could be little doubt of his course of action should he come upon us in our present plight. With twenty rifles to back him up, he would attempt to carry out his original plans in regard to us. Failing to elude them, our one hope seemed to be that Gaklen's party and the Jurgis band might clash, giving us the opportunity to effect our escape while our two enemies fought it out.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VISION OF THE PRIESTS.

WE had been so concerned with our struggle to come again to ground where our chances were at least even that we had given no heed to the gen-

eral scheme of things. All our energies had been concentrated on first necessities. But after determining that there was now as much danger before us as behind, we decided we would do well to remain in this out-of-the-way robat till the morning of the next day. Harrison and I now had time to confer alone and to gather information from the others. The mix-up we found was disconcerting to say the least.

I had noticed that matters between Grace and Harrison were strained in some queer way. He was silent, almost sullen; she pensive; and they continually avoided each other. Perhaps they had been thrown together entirely too much for their peace of mind. I expected him to seek an early opportunity to talk with me alone, but he did not. As we were settling our rough camp in the robat I said to Grace: "What's the matter with you and Harrison?"

She flushed and looked embarrassed. "I don't know," she replied. "I suppose—he has been very nice, and I like him. Why?"

"He has been in the blues for two days," I said.

"I believe he is jealous."

"Of whom?" I asked.

"Of you."

I stared at her, speechless. She went on: "I was talking with him of you, and I said a number of things which he agreed were true. Never mind what they were; but he resented my saying them, I am sure."

"But you said he was jealous?"

"He says I am in love with you."

"Well, are you?"

Her eyes blazed, and she said very slowly, but very forcibly: "No!" Then she turned and walked away.

I kicked myself for a fool. I had been surprised into the question, but that didn't excuse it. I had not been really listening to her; I was thinking more of our dangerous situation. But now my mind flew back to the evening

I had wakened her in Astrabad. Any woman would have attributed my manner then to something better than mere liking, and she could not be expected to analyze an awkward man's sentiments.

I began to feel more and more like a cad and a fool. There were three of us now wandering around, looking sort of dazed, and Milna divined at once that somehow she was out in the cold; but just then I could not think of any way of explaining to her what was the matter with us. I'd been patting myself on the back for various and divers reasons, but all the conceit in my make-up died a sudden death, and very somberly I hunted up Ben Mullek to confer with him on the more urgent matter of food.

He said he could get eggs, goat's milk, and other food in the hamlet, so I gave him a gold piece with instructions to pay well and find out what he could about the party that had preceded us. He came back with the news that our surmise was correct: Gaklen had been the leader of the party. It was time we cleared up some of the mysteries in which we moved before some crushing blow fell on us out of the dark.

The logical thing was to question the Kurd about his share in this adventure, but Melkora and Ben Mullek were the only ones who could translate for us, and I was not yet ready to trust either. The Kurd apparently was devotion itself, and I believed he would be truthful. I conferred with Harrison, and we decided to utilize Milna's limited translating abilities rather than trust the others. Before we called them to the place where we were sitting under a plane tree apart from the robat, I told Harrison all that I had learned from Gaklen when I had him at the nose of my pistol and asked for the details of his capture of the Kurd and the winning over of Ben Mullek.

Harrison's proceedings had been very

simple. When I did not return and Gaklen disappeared after giving some instructions to Ben Mullek, Harrison offered a round bribe to the coffee vender to tell all he knew at the rate of a Persian ruble for every fact worth while. Mullek literally strained his intelligence in search of facts.

However, all that he knew beyond Gaklen's engaging him for the capture of Milna and to conduct the base of operations and communications in Astrabad was that there was some profound mystery between Gaklen and Melkora; that Gaklen would not have gone to the extent that he had if he had not been moving on some plan bigger than the capture and sale of a pretty girl. He was a villain of greater caliber than that of a slave raider and dealer. But Ben Mullek did not know Milna's whereabouts nor Gaklen's movements.

After learning all he could, Harrison had told Ben Mullek of the watch kept by the Kurds, and seeing this one across the way, they had brought him into the house and forced him to tell his business by gentle pistol persuasion. The Kurd, knowing that he or any of his kind were in peril at a wrong word in Astrabad, said he knew nothing save that he, his twin brother, and some other men had been sent by their chief to watch Ben Mullek's house and a Jurgis camp in the mountains, and riders went over the passes daily with reports of all they saw.

The Kurd said there was a very beautiful young girl in the Jurgis camp. Acting on this information, Harrison had Ben Mullek secure horses and saddles, and the four set out for the camp, only to ride straight into Elbek Nadir Rustam Khan's trap.

When Harrison had finished, we called the Kurd to come and sit on the ground with us, and we set Milna to the task of questioning him. He had evidently made up his mind to tell all he knew, and soon, judging from Mil-

na's rapt attention and sparkling eyes, he was relating an absorbing story. She did not interrupt him once, and when at last he ceased to speak, she turned to us, her face glowing.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "it is wonderful! It is hard to believe the things he tells me, and I suppose you will laugh—but who knows? You do not understand this wonderful East, with its age-old beliefs, its mysteries, its traditions, and strange way of hiding its secrets behind stranger stories. It is a strange tale that this man tells me, but he believes in its truth, as do all his people.

"For centuries," she went on, "this man's tribe has had a tradition that long ago there was a king not far from here who was the richest man in the world."

"Croesus of the Midas—that's true enough," put in Harrison quietly, while I nodded.

"The tradition says," Milna resumed, "that this king got all his gold and jewels from mines in this very country where we are now. The secret of the location of the mines was jealously guarded. In the course of time, after the king passed away, his dynasty fell, and long years of savage war followed. For centuries this country became a kind of no man's land, a land of desolation, much as it is this very day. The secret of the mines was lost—became a vague tradition; and when the Kurds came to hold the country and delved into its history, they had little beyond the bare knowledge that somewhere within these valleys where they roamed and fought were the sources of the great king's wealth. They still cling to the tradition, and have never ceased to hunt for the mines."

"I suppose you know," said Harrison to me, "that the province of Bakashan, in Afghanistan, has been identified as the place where the monarchs of the Persian and Mongol kingdoms secured their wonderful rubies and lapis lazuli, and that the greatest turquoise mines

in the world lie in the Sajiabad, a little northwest of Meshed, not far from the ruins of the ancient Naishapur. These traditions are not always to be sneered at—this East is a strange land, and, as Milna says, who knows? But, Milna, why does the Kurd tell us these things now; what has the wealth of Croesus to do with you or us?"

"That is the most wonderful part of it all—it has everything to do with us!" the girl replied. She spoke hesitatingly, evidently doubtful of the effect her words would have on us; but a glance at our faces reassured her. We were not laughing. When you have been in the East a little while, you do not laugh. You listen—wondering a little, perhaps, but you listen, and, more often than not, you, too, begin to dream.

"This tale," Milna went on, "throws a great light on all that has happened to us. It makes everything clear, no matter how strange the explanation may sound in American ears. You know that not far from Naishapur is the sacred lake of Sovar. Well, it seems that in their last pilgrimage to the lake the tribal priests claim to have seen a vision of some sort, and they brought back a prophecy that the lost mines of the king were about to be found—found through *me*! Think of it! They said that I, calling me by name, would come to Astrabad a slave, possessed of the secret, and would carry it to the chief of the tribe. They have been watching for me for two years. Other tribes heard of the prophecy—the Jurgis among them—and many have been killed in plots and counterplots and the efforts of the rival tribes to intercept me—that is how I came to be captured by the Jurgis.

"But I know nothing about this secret—nothing about any of it," she added, in a faltering voice. "Yet, in some unknown way, I may be connected with this mystery, or how did the priests come to mention my name? Perhaps—

oh, Ralph, let us get away from this terrible East!"

"Ken," said Harrison, "you and I can sit here and call all this nonsense, but that won't get us back to New York with whole skins—and it won't change facts! We have had ample evidence that the people of this fascinating, but uncomfortable, land are taking their traditions and prophecies mighty seriously, and I have a hunch it is up to us to do likewise—until we have the solid deck of a liner under our feet. I would like very much to investigate that curious prophecy, but I'd rather do it from a safe distance, and I think Milna would, too.

"Sense or nonsense," he went on, "we don't need any further proof that these fanatics are going to move heaven and earth to get hold of Milna. They are fighting among themselves now, but I'll bet that rather than let her get out of the country, they'll come to some working agreement; and then we won't have even the slim chance we have now. There is but one thing to do—we must push on to Meshed at once. We may make it, and though we may not be altogether safe even there, at least we shall be in touch with civilization."

"We shall be safe in Meshed—if we can only get there!" said Milna quickly. "I might have told you before, but so much has happened! We are forgetting that it was to Meshed I was going when I set out on my ill-fated journey. In Meshed, I was to stay at the house of a good friend of my father's. It was all arranged between the two of them before I started. I was to place myself in this friend's care—no doubt he is waiting now and expecting to see me hourly! He is an influential man, and will let no harm come to me, or to any one with me. His name is Akir."

I started, as it flashed on me where I had heard that name before. "Milna," I asked, "did you ever see this man—can you describe him?"

"Yes," she answered, her lips trembling, as she caught the anxiety in my voice. She had not spoken a dozen words when my suspicion became conviction.

"Milna," I interrupted, "do you know who your supposed friend is? He is the little man who was acting with the Kurds in Astrabad—the very man I followed to the Jurgis camp!"

To my astonishment, instead of showing any excitement at my discovery, Harrison calmly put his arm over Milna's trembling shoulder and patted it, grinning at me and frankly enjoying my angry amazement. Harrison had his own peculiar way of handling situations.

"Never mind, Milna," he said, ignoring me, "this simply means that we shall be deprived of Mr. Akir's hospitality while in Meshed—you certainly picked out a grand little country to be born in!"

We set out at once, and even in our desperate situation I could think of only one thing as we went along—Milna had shown not the slightest objection to being patted on the shoulder by Harrison. She had gazed into his eyes while he talked to her—she was walking on ahead with him now!

CHAPTER XII.

THE BATTLE IN THE MOUNTAINS.

AFTER a weary journey afoot, we reached Maxinan, a village where we were able to buy enough good transport and food and two modern rifles with sixty rounds of ammunition; then we went on to Naishapur. There we were able to get everything we wanted, as there were many friends of Professor van Moren in the town, even some who knew both Grace and Milna. We stayed two days, and Harrison and I organized an excellent party so far as horses, donkeys, equipment, and arms were concerned. Even the number of

men was ample, but as fighters their character was under par. Any one could see that with half an eye. A mountain Jurgis was worth two of them, a Kiwanklu Kurd worth three.

We decided that rather than make a long, trying detour we would attempt to cross the mountains by the Cudar-i-Darrud Pass over the Kuh-i-Nishapur, ten thousand feet in the air, and descend the steep slope to Meshed.

It might and might not have been more dangerous. The Kurd had learned by making guarded inquiries in Naishapur that Gaklen's party had gone that way, and if they should turn back from Meshed they would look for us on the lower route. I had been afraid to use a telegraph station, as Gaklen was clever enough to have spies among the clerks in Astrabad who would inform him in Meshed.

The exact status of Melkora in our party was so uncertain that we decided not to ask her to contribute to our fund of knowledge the many things that she must know. She was most amicable and useful, and seemed to have our common interests at heart, but it was wiser, considering that Gaklen had proved the traitor and that Gaklen was her husband, to allow her to declare herself or remain silent.

Once more on horseback with a good rifle and a double belt of ammunition over his shoulder, the Kurd was a splendid figure, and, dividing our men into two squads, one to keep the rear and one to take the advance and do the scouting, I gave him command of the vanguard. It was with reluctance that we set forth from the security of the ancient town, for our misgivings were far from vague. Still, there was nothing to be gained by tarrying.

The first night was bitterly cold, and the air so clear and dry that in the moonlight we could see for many miles. This made the guards' work easy. The second day we entered no defile with-

out the most careful inspection, for of dangers there were three sorts. We might be waylaid by Gaklen and his men; we might be overtaken or intercepted by the Jurgis, or, in that wild country, we might even be attacked by a wandering band just on general principles.

Toward evening we were skirting a rocky shoulder well out of sight when Harrison sent one of the rear guard galloping up to signal me that something alarming had been seen. I rode back with the glasses I had got in Naishapur, and, keeping well under cover of the rocks, we scanned the pass far to the rear, where the setting sun threw it into silhouette. The keen eyes of an Elburz man had seen something moving against the lighted sky. At the first look Harrison swore under his breath.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Do you remember that little plateau we passed this afternoon, the one with the snow-water lake? Look! If that isn't that Jurgis cutthroat going into camp there, I'll eat my hat."

Ten minutes' careful study with perfectly adjusted glasses left no doubt about it. It was Elbek Nadir Rustam Khan's band, well worn down with hard riding through the mountains. The drooping heads of the horses showed that. He meant to camp and then creep up on us in the night. There was nothing for us to do but to press ahead by moonlight.

With a concealed fire, we cooked supper, lightened our transport of everything not absolutely needed to get into Meshed, and went wearily on out into the night.

The return of imminent danger silenced the women and keyed up the more spirited men. The others it drove into a blue funk. There were about a half a dozen of the cowards I would gladly have pummeled within an inch of their lives.

It was an hour before midnight when we reached a ridge that we knew to be the last before the final descent. As we neared the highest point the Kurd rode forward, as was his method, and dismounted. Just as he reached the top he threw up his hand and retired quickly. Halting the party and passing the sign to keep strict silence and to have arms in readiness, I dismounted, gave my horse's rein to Grace, and ran forward.

Not a hundred yards down the slope on a broad shelf, where the trail passed close to a waterfall, was a fire and a large camp. It was a mounted and armed party, with the men rolled close together for warmth, their rifles stacked at their feet. A guard leaned against a rock, drowsing. Apart, one lone figure paced up and down. It needed but one glance to see that the lone figure was Gaklen.

This was a pretty kettle of fish. The Jurgis were coming from behind us, and Gaklen and his men were blocking the way before us. With the leader wide awake, we could not rush the camp on our horses, as he would hear the hoofs as we approached, and would summon the men to arms. The only thing to do was to advance on foot as noiselessly as possible, with enough men to attempt the capture of the camp. The remainder of the party could gallop through at first shot, and we on foot could make an effort to regain our horses.

Ben Mullek was put in charge of four men to convoy Melkora and the girls. Both Milna and Grace begged for arms, and I gave them a gun each.

When all was in readiness, Harrison, the Kurd, and I, with the remaining men, crept forward and gained the rocks from which we had reconnoitered the camp. The guard was now fast asleep, but Gaklen was still pacing to and fro. Just then, with the perversity of its kind, one of our donkeys broke the night silence with an unearthly bray.

"Up, men, up!" screamed Gaklen, as we dashed down on him.

Gaklen whipped out one of my fine automatics and began firing. One of the Naishapur men fell between Harrison and myself. A bullet burned my left forearm. I heard a shriek from behind, and saw that one of the men of the four left behind was writhing in the road.

I turned my fire on the men rushing for their arms, hoping to confuse them till we could get down on the plateau, where we could spread out, but the hills of Khorassan are full of men who are born to battle and night alarms; Gaklen had recruited a fine force. They behaved splendidly. We were through the defile and deploying among the rocks, however, before they got their arms and got under cover.

"Come on, come on, ride right through!" I shouted to the convoy, and, urging their horses to a mad gallop, they came up the slope and thence through the camp like a tornado. We were firing rapidly, but our Naishapur men were aiming wildly. Gaklen understood the maneuver, and directed his own fire on the mounted party.

As they dashed ahead I saw Grace sitting lightly in her saddle, her horse well held and her gun doing the work as if she were a veteran cavalry fighter. A man rushed to seize her bridle, but reeled back before the flame from the muzzle of her pistol and pitched on his back.

A piercing scream cut through the noise of the battle. Melkora reeled in her saddle, and I caught a glimpse of Milna holding the old woman on as they dashed through. Ben Mullek's horse went down, and he pitched from the saddle, but rose. One of Gaklen's men rushed on him with clubbed rifle, and, leaping from cover, Harrison ran forward to his aid. One of the fallen horses blocked the way, and Harrison

fell as Gaklen fired, and his body lay prone on that of the struggling animal.

The Kurd was there almost instantly. He caught Harrison up like a sack of meal and bore him on toward our horses, deposited him beside Milna, then turned back. It was hand to hand now. Poor Ben Mullek lay dead, but there were two stark bodies of the enemy stretched beside him.

Suddenly I found myself surrounded by three bearded mountaineers. I was sure my finish had come when a gun spoke twice. Grace had ridden back to my aid, and I had not seen her. Two of my foes dropped, and the third ran. The Kurd was rushing, barehanded, on Gaklen, who, seeing him coming, fired the last shot in his rifle, and missed. With a wild bound, he made for the shelter of the rocks, the Kurd hot on his trail.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The succeeding chapters of this novel, beginning with Chapter XIII, following the synopsis introduced for new readers, will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out September 1st. It began in the August 1st number. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.

A Narrow Escape

A YOUNG lawyer, not noted for intelligence, succeeded in getting a client acquitted of murder. Meeting a friend a few days afterward, the lawyer was greeted with warm congratulations.

"Yes," he said, mopping his brow, "I got him off, but it was a narrow escape."

"A narrow escape? How?"

"Ah, the tightest squeeze you ever saw. You know, I examined the witnesses and made the arguments myself, the plea being self-defense. The jury was out two whole days. Finally the

judge called them before him and asked what the trouble was.

"Only one thing, your honor," replied the foreman. "Was the prisoner's counsel retained by him or appointed by the court?"

"No, gentlemen, the prisoner is a man of means," said the judge, "and engaged his own counsel."

"I could not see what bearing the question had on the evidence," continued the lawyer, "but ten minutes later, in filed the jury, and what do you think the verdict was?"

"What?" asked his friend.

"Why, not guilty, on the ground of insanity."

The Reason for Prosperity

THE minister was paying his weekly visits to the poor members of his flock. At most of the modest homes he found an air of gloom and dissatisfaction, for work was scarce and money scarcer still. But at last he came to the cottage where lived Bill Byles, his wife, and four children. Here, to his great surprise, things looked more prosperous.

As a rule, the Byles family were always in the depth of poverty, in spite of the fact that Mrs. Byles took in washing. Bill was an inveterate loafer, and took all his wife's earnings to defray the expenses of his lazy life. But now the usually dirty cottage was resplendent with clean curtains, flowers in the windows, and a general appearance of prosperity.

The parson beamed down on Mrs. Byles, who was smiling happily. "And is your husband working?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered the woman cheerfully.

"Has he been working long?"

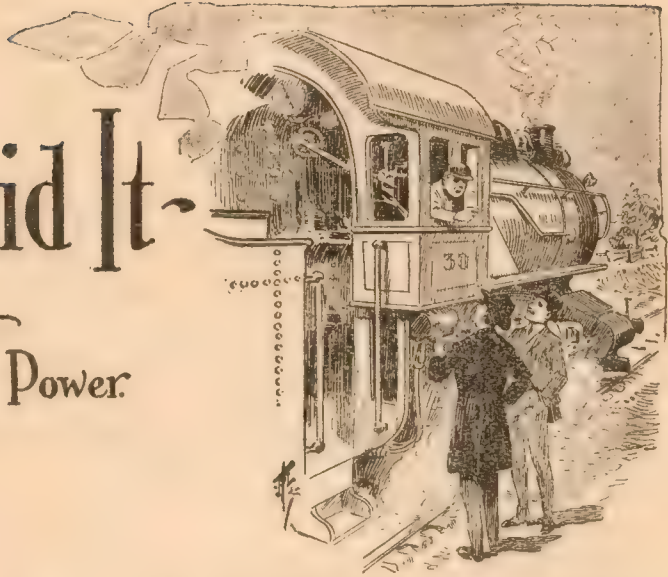
"Three weeks to-day, sir."

"Really! And what is he doing?"

"Six months, sir."

He Said It-

By
Edward F Power



BILL THOMAS had the best run, the best engine, and one of the best firemen on the whole system. But truth compels the sad admission that Bill was not one of the heroic, popular-fiction kind of engineers. For one thing, he chewed too much tobacco. His idea of all the necessities and luxuries of this life, combined, was an unlimited supply of "good-eatin'" plug. This was bad enough, but when it is known that he never petted his engine, never called her baby names, or used bad language to her whenever she failed to steam properly, it can be seen what little chance he had of ever sitting among the immortals.

He was never to be found in the roundhouse, tenderly stroking her driving rods, or carefully polishing her brasswork while he talked confidentially to her; in fact, the one thing that made him wild was to hear or read of any such "bunk," as he inelegantly termed it. To him, an engine was the tool he used in making a living; nothing more. But he was a careful, practical man, who drew good money, made his runs

on time, and so satisfied both himself and the management.

One afternoon, as usual, he was taking a last look at the bearings and oil cups before pulling out with the limited. As he stood by the main driver, with his mind about equally divided between the amount of oil he was pouring, and the flavor of a new brand of "chewing" he was trying for the first time, he became conscious of the fact that two men were standing watching him with great apparent interest. One of the two was a most ordinary individual, but the other was worth looking at twice. Very tall and thin, dressed in a suit of rusty, clerical black, he had the most solemn face that Bill had ever seen. He looked as if he had all the grief of the world in his soul, and a nail in his shoe besides.

As Bill looked up, he spoke, in a voice as melancholy as his face: "Wonderful! Wonderful are the works of man! Is it not so, my friend?"

"Huh?" queried Bill.

"I say how wonderful it is to contemplate the handiwork of man! How the mighty forces of nature are sub-

duced and made to work his will! Is it not so?"

"Yep. Guess so," Bill grunted impatiently. He really didn't care whether it was or not.

"Take this great monster," went on the other, "tons of iron and steel, molded together into a mass capable of crushing hundreds upon hundreds of men, and yet humble and obedient to the will of one! Are you not filled with awe as you guide it upon its course and think of the force you are controlling?"

By this time Bill had come to two conclusions. The first was that the new brand was better than any he had tried yet; the other was that this melancholy person was one who had been reading about the brave engineer and his idolized "iron steed," and who evidently wanted to hear some more of the same talk. Well, he'd get it! Sure he'd get it! Bill was an obliging chap.

And so, as becomes one who would instruct the ignorant and impart facts worth knowing, he developed a great earnestness. "Yes, mister, you're right," he replied. "It is wonderful. But then, you know, they ain't all like this old girl here. Believe me, mister, this is some engine. On the level, now, I don't suppose there's another one like her in the whole country."

"Indeed? You astonish me!" returned the stranger.

"Yep," Bill went on, warming up. "You see, when a feller goes pikin' up and down the country on the drivin' seat of one of them steamers, day and night, he gets so he kind of understands them. I've handled a good many in my time, but never none like my old friend here. She sure is the wisest I ever see."

"Wisest?" inquired the other, with the most flattering interest.

"Uh-huh!" Bill was going well by this time. "Sounds funny, don't it? You see, we get so we just naturally

know them, like they were real people, and so sometimes we get attached to 'em, just like I am to this old girl. For I sure do think a lot of her. Why, say, mister, on the level, I'd be ashamed to have any one hear me callin' her the pet names I do sometimes. I say things to her I wouldn't say to my wife, even."

Bill was right. Lots of the things he said to her he wouldn't say to his wife. He wouldn't dare. But, of course, this melancholy individual did not know anything about that, so he went gayly on:

"Yep, it's wonderful how you get attached to 'em. After a while you can have as much confidence in your engine as in a man, and a darn sight more than in some men, at that. Men—huh! Why, she knows more'n most men. Anyhow, she knows how to do things just the way I want 'em done. Yes, sir, that's what! You'd hardly believe that, now would you?"

The other man believed, right enough, or else he was a most polite person. His long face seemed sadder than ever, if that were possible, but he was listening with a sympathetic interest that was most comforting. To Bill's direct appeal he responded nobly, even to the extent of enlisting the enthusiasm of his friend, who had been saying nothing at all with great diligence.

"It is indeed marvelous! Think of it, Joseph! This mighty mass of matter, inanimate, dead, yet waiting to spring to life at the touch of its master! Vibrant with strength to do the work of hundreds, moving in unison with the will of the brave man, imbued with an intelligence almost equal to that heavenly gift vouchsafed to the human race alone! Mind and matter moving together as one in the eternal march of progress! It is epochal! It is the apotheosis of finite achievement! Does it not thrill you to think of it?"

II.

IF Joseph were thrilled, he did not show it; he kept right on saying nothing. But Bill had caught a look in his cold gray eyes once or twice which made him think that perhaps the gentleman had a few ideas of his own on the subject. Still, this solemn person evidently wanted thrills, and far be it from Bill to refuse him. Therefore he went cheerfully on, while his fireman looked down from the gangway with a very strange expression on his face.

"That's the ticket!" Bill returned. "You got my idea, though, of course, I couldn't make the English language behave like you do in a thousand years. Those were sure some hot words you uncorked that time. But it's right about that workin'-together thing. Say, this old girl understands everything I say to her. Fact! By golly, I'm almost afraid, sometimes, she acts so. Seems as if she knew just what I was thinkin'."

The other nodded seriously. "Some obscure manifestation of psychological attraction, no doubt."

"Say, that doesn't sound bad," Bill replied. "Anyhow, she sure does understand me, and behaves like a human. Lemme tell you something. This sounds like a lie, but it is the gospel truth. All the boys knows about it. When I first got her, I used to swear a little. Not much, you understand, but a little——"

Here there was a strange sound from the gangway, and Bill looked up indignantly; but only the fireman's shoe was to be seen. Giving it a sideways kick, which was apparently accidental, he went on:

"So, naturally, when I took her out and anythin' went wrong, I'd swear. And then, so help me, she'd act worse than ever! Yep, the more I swore, the more contrary she'd behave. Used to make me fair wild. Then one day I'm feelin' pretty good, so instead of swear-

in' I began to coax her. And on the level, that old girl just settled down to work like a kid eatin' popcorn! I've tried it hundreds of times since, and it's always the same. She'll do anythin' at all if I ask her nice and lovin', but she just naturally won't stand for bein' swore at. Now how do you explain that?"

Bill asked the question rather anxiously, for he was afraid the other might explain; but the conductor was calling "All aboard!" so the two strangers had to go. The solemn one turned away reluctantly. "It is most interesting," he said. "I should like to make a story of it." And he added politely, as they went: "I trust I shall see you soon again, my friend."

"Not if I see you first, you old yap," thought Bill, as he climbed aboard to face the accusing gaze of his fireman. "Well?" he asked cheerfully.

"Well!" repeated the other. "What the—— Say, Bill, for the love of Mike, what's the matter with you, anyway? I never heard you talk that kind of stuff before. Have you got a leak in your sand box, or what?"

"Nope," answered Bill, who was feeling rather proud of himself. "You heard him, didn't you? He wanted information and interestin' talk, didn't he? Well, he got what he wanted."

"Yes," was the reply. "And I heard you, too. You used to swear a little, didn't you? A little! Holy suffering smokestacks! A little!"

"Sure," Bill returned, with a grin. "He was a nice sort of gink, even if his face did look like it had a pain in it. And if he wanted to hear all about the brave engineer, why, it was up to your Uncle Bill to tell him. Now if you was anything but a bonehead of a coal passer, and a mighty bum one at that, you'd understand my kind actions. But you ain't, so what's the use? Here, take a chew of this, and if you don't say it's the best you ever tasted, I'll

ram you in the fire box and see if I can't get some steam out of you that way."

Having settled things satisfactorily, Bill bit off a healthy chew for himself, caught his signal, and the train slid quietly out of the shed, on time to the minute.

III.

THE first part of Bill's run was the best, having only two stops in nearly a hundred miles. An easy, uphill pull brought him to Westville, thirty miles away; then a straight run across country to Seldon, sixty miles beyond. The only other station of any consequence was Waynetown, about midway between Westville and Seldon. But, as the limited was timed to slide by it without even a pause, Bill and his fireman had a comfortable time of it for a couple of hours.

On this particular afternoon, the old engine was running perfectly; the new brand of tobacco was improving in flavor the more it was sampled; the weather was fine. Taking things altogether, Bill was quite satisfied with life. Occasionally he thought of the melancholy personage who had such fool ideas about locomotives, but it was with an amused tolerance of his folly. After all, he was no worse than lots of others. Bill was thinking of some more wonderful things that he might have told, when Westville was reached.

The time card for the sixty miles between Westville and Seldon called for some pretty lively running; but Bill was always there with the necessary speed, without any thought of having to stop. So his surprise was quite natural when, about eight miles from Waynetown, the air was applied from the train behind him. It was evident that something was wrong, so Bill pulled her up and looked back to find out the trouble.

He did not have long to wait, for before the wheels had ceased turning a

man jumped from the platform of the nearest Pullman and came running toward him, just as the fireman pulled in his head from the other side and yelled across the cab: "A holdup!"

But what caused Bill's eyes to pop out with amazement was the fact that the man running toward the engine was none other than the sorrowful-looking individual who had taken such a polite and friendly interest in Bill and his fairy tales, only he was not so polite and friendly now. Far from it. He had a handkerchief across his face as a mask, and in each hand he carried a revolver that seemed large enough to sink a battleship. Nor was there anything pedantic about his language on this occasion. He was short and sharp, and meant business; his first words showed that:

"Hey, you, Casey Jones, send that fireman of yours back here to cut you off from the train. Get a move on, now; this ain't no rest cure. And if either of you start any monkey business, I'll blow your roof off. Come a-runnin', you fireman!"

He meant business, all right, and they knew it. So the fireman hopped down and uncoupled from the baggage car. Then the silent Joseph appeared with more guns and hustled him back on the engine, more speedily than politely. The tall one climbed up into the cab behind Bill and ordered: "Now you start movin', quick, and keep right on movin'. The sooner you are away from here, the better for you."

There was no doubting the fact that he was in deadly earnest, so Bill did just what any sensible engineer would have done in the circumstances—he obeyed orders. As the engine moved off, trainmen and passengers began scrambling from the cars, shouting wild remonstrances and wilder advice. But Bill had a wholesome respect for the long gentleman with the revolvers, so he attended strictly to business. The si-

lent Joseph sat up on the fireman's seat and watched every move of that individual with a cold glare that scared him almost to death.

They had covered a mile or so in silence when the tall holdup man spoke: "You got the right of way, haven't you? Nothin' against you?"

"Nope."

"How far is it to Waynetown? About six or seven miles, ain't it?"

"About. Want me to stop there?"

"Not on your life, you don't stop there! You stop when I tell you to, and not before!"

"All right, all right," Bill replied quickly. "You're the doctor."

"You're just whoopin'! I am the doctor, and I'll leave one good job for the undertaker if you don't do just what I tell you to. You scoot past Waynetown like a pup after a rabbit, whether they got a board against you or not. Know that long stretch of woods about ten miles out of town, just past the Fox Creek trestle?"

"Yep."

"Well, you stop right in the middle of them woods, and not before. Joe and me has a couple of horses waitin' for us there, and they might get lonesome if we don't come soon. Understand?"

"Sure," Bill replied.

"All right, then. Behave yourself."

IV.

A FEW miles farther on, Bill began to wonder about the time, and looked at his watch. It was a gold one and of considerable value. As he put it back in his pocket, the silent Joe spoke for the first time: "Say, Buck, that's a pretty good watch that chap is wearin'. Better take it."

"Sure," Buck replied. "It would go well with that collection of ours. Hand it over, you!"

"What!" yelled Bill. "You're not

going to take my watch, are you, after me helping you to get away like this?"

"Sure I'm goin' to take it. Do you think we're in this business for fun? Well, we ain't. You're up against the real thing this time, bo, so come across."

The watch was handed over; then the man addressed by his companion as Buck said: "Now I'm goin' to sit over on that seat alongside of Joe, there, but you keep right on movin'. I'll have my eye on you, and if there's any slackin' up in this old teapot's gait, there'll be trouble in bunches."

When they were within a couple of miles of Waynetown, Bill remembered that in the excitement he hadn't had a chew for some time. So he reached back to his hip pocket for the plug. But at the movement there was a shout: "Stop it! Keep your hands away from there!" yelled Buck.

"Aw," began Bill, "I was only reaching for a chew."

"So you've got some chewin' tobacco, have you? Now that's luck. Joe and me forgot ours, and we won't have a chance to get any more soon, so that plug of yours'll come in handy. Throw it over here."

"Say, for the love of Moses!" yelled Bill. "You're not goin' to take all my chewing, too, are you?"

"Sure. We're such good friends of yours that we'd take anything you've got. Wouldn't we, Joe?" was Buck's cheerful reply, as he took Bill's only plug, bit off a mouthful, and passed the rest to his companion with an invitation to go as far as he liked with it.

But Joe was not to be mollified. "That feller is too fresh," he growled, with a sour glance at Bill. "He's one of them joshers. That line of talk he hands out to us about his old engine gives me a pain. And he thinks we're yaps enough to fall for it. He's got a crust. Say, if we didn't have to use him, I'd take one shot at him, just for luck."

Buck only laughed. He was too well satisfied with the way things were going to be anything but good-natured. His plans had worked to perfection. They had made a good haul, and in a few minutes more their escape would be accomplished without a hitch. So he sat up beside Joe on the fireman's seat and proceeded to have some fun with Bill as they came in sight of Waynetown station.

"No, Joe," he protested. "No, you shouldn't get sore at Casey Jones, here. He didn't intend to lie to us. He wouldn't do such a thing. He was tellin' the truth, but the trouble is, this old engine of his won't back him up. She's gone back on him. Plumb ungrateful, I call it. Notice he's not lookin' very well? That's because he don't have proper rest. Sits up all night takin' care of his pet, here, so she won't get sore throat or the colic. Can't take her home with him, of course, so he spends night after night in the roundhouse, wipin' off little grease spots and singin' her to sleep like a mother with a sick kid.

"Now you'd think most engines would have some gratitude," he went on, "and be glad to do him a favor after bein' treated that way, wouldn't you? But not this one. No, sir! She let us come up here and frisk his nice watch and all his tobacco, and she don't object at all. And then the reward! Now, if she'd only take away our guns and tie us up and turn us over to the sheriff, think of the nice big reward he'd get. No, she ain't acting according to the rules. I'm disappointed in this old engine; I sure am. What's the matter, you brave engineer?" he jeered at Bill. "Haven't been quarreling, have you? Or did you forget yourself and swear at her a little?"

"Aw," began Bill disgustedly, "what the——" But he got no further. For as he spoke there was a crash, and the two robbers shot out of their seats forward and up against the boilerhead and the roof of the cab with a force that knocked them both unconscious.

V.

IT took Bill but a moment to realize just what had happened. Then he shot off in a hurry and brought up directly in front of the depot. In the meantime, the fireman had not been idle. With a piece of the bell cord, a handkerchief, and his own belt, he had the two holdup men tied hand and foot in almost less time than it takes to tell it.

The rest was easy, for it happened that the flower of Waynetown's police force had wandered down to the depot to see the limited go by. The officer took charge of affairs, and the robbers were on their way to the local jail before they had sufficiently recovered to know just how it had all come about.

When the excitement had subsided, it was necessary to go back after the train, but Bill was not in his place. They found him at last around on the left-hand side of the cab. Hands on hips, he was standing motionless, gazing at the driving rod, which had broken off, and, flying upward with the turn of the wheel, had crashed through the fireman's seat above it with such dire results to the two robbers.

It was a long time before Bill spoke. But it is doubtful if the whole history of spoken words can show an instance where more shades of meaning have been expressed in so short a sentence as that used by Bill when he said: "Well, I'll be hanged!"

— *A Tale of South Sea Baseball* —

The Guile of King Magoo

By
Will Gage Carey

(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)



CHAPTER I.

INTO REALMS UNKNOWN.



HAT we need right now, Harold, is a player to plug up that hole at third, one who can wing 'em over to first, cover his territory without a fish net, and be able to sting the old pill on the beak when up in a pinch. Know any such?"

I had been doing some successful scouting for the Watermelon League, and it was the manager of one of the teams in that classy little Southern circuit who put the question to me, as he and I stood at the side lines watching his players in practice before a game.

"Well, Larry," I answered, "they're to be had, of course, but right now——"

"Do you know one you could get for me?" he persisted.

"I know where to go to look for a third sacker such as you require," I replied guardedly. "To land him it might take a considerable amount of money, and perhaps a risk of life."

"You should worry about the money, so long as we pay it," he came back at me; then he added, with a grin: "And the risk of life you mention is absolutely nothing to us—so long as you take it." Though he spoke half in jest, I knew there was a chance for business if I could make good. I began thinking it over.

Of late, scouting had been good—and bad. There was renewed interest and activity in baseball; managers were ready and waiting to exchange good money for suitable talent; but scouting had been going on so thoroughly, it seemed to me, that good material was hard to find. Every young busher who could show even a flash of speed was shipped off in a hurry, lest some rival scout come nosing around and gobble up what might develop into a phenom. It was fierce, and getting worse.

Then from an old sea captain I received glad tidings; I learned of a land of pure delight—a scouter's paradise.

"If it's ball players you want, lad," the old sea dog had said, "sail with me

down into the southern seas. They raise 'em big down there, an' fast; why, son, the best ball game I ever saw in my life was down there on the island of——"

"Forget it, captain!" I said to him then. "What if I did go down there with you—and come back with some big Shinola? Why I couldn't ever place him in organized baseball——"

"Some of 'em down there," he answered, "are as white as you, speak jes' as good English; an' as for baseball, an' inside stuff, why, those South Sea gents are there; you've got to hand it to 'em."

I did not take much stock in the captain's tip at first; that is, not until I'd talked with other sailors from down that way. They all told me the same thing—that they had seen players down on those shimmering South Sea islands that for fielding and batting could show up some of our best big leaguers. It sounded good. I began making careful inquiries. I asked them how I would likely find business if I went scouting down there for players. They told me that without any possible doubt I would find what I was looking for; in short, business was likely to be very good—and very risky. So much I could learn; no more. Just where the danger in such a venture lay they couldn't, or wouldn't, tell me. I could only surmise.

Now, with the manager's plea to me to find him a good third baseman, my thoughts instantly took flight to those far-off South Sea islands where romped talent galore—the best in the world, eager, anxious to sign up; a region as yet all unspoiled by spying scouts.

I talked with him further. I found that he was in deadly earnest; that he was determined to find a man to hold down the third corner in a manner to suit him cost what it might. My mind was made up then and there. "I'm going out to get the man you want,

Larry," I said. "You offer big money; I'm taking on big risks. Another thing: I may not be able to bring in this player till well along in the season——"

"You get him!" he broke in curtly. "If I can't use him this season, I can next."

I left him then to make immediate preparations for a trip away into realms unknown, where talent thrived and danger lurked, where the furtive foot of a festive scout had never before trod.

CHAPTER II.

IN RESPONSE TO SIGNALS.

MY sea-captain friend was about to start again on an extended voyage among the islands down below the Society group. Fortunately I was able to secure passage with him. The place he advised me to visit, Fantii, was an island lying considerably off his course as first planned, and the regular course of all vessels, yet he agreed not only to put me ashore there, but to cruise for a week or so around the neighboring islands as well, trading with the natives, so that he could take me away again at the end of that period.

We sighted Fantii at noon on a clear June day. My first glimpse of the island was far from alluring. High, rugged cliffs towered aloft along the coast line, like the grim ramparts of some giant's fortress, dark, gloomy, and foreboding.

It seemed to me that on so mountainous and rugged an island there would be scarcely level space sufficient for a ball field; in this conjecture I was mistaken. The black, frowning peaks first sighted proved but part of a promontory; when we rounded this, the real Fantii smiled to us a friendly though passive welcome; for now the interior lay stretched out before us a gorgeous, inviting panorama of tranquil, tropical splendor. A beach of gleaming sand fringed the shore; then waving palms,

stretches of verdant fields and forests, and far inland the first slopes of a range of hills half hidden in purple haze.

There was no harbor, the water being too shallow for large ships to approach within a league; so they rowed me to shore, the captain bestowing on me words of warning and advice as the boat was lowered over the side. "Well, Harold," he called down from the rail, in parting, "my regards to the ruler of Fantii! He's a sly old dog, is King Magoo, an' he'll be your friend or foe as the notion strikes; so keep a weather eye on him."

With mysterious Fantii looming up close at hand, the whole project seemed different entirely to when I first planned the venture; but I called back as cheerily as I could: "Aye, aye, captain!" Then we pulled away for the white strand.

We reached the shore safely; the sailors rowed back to the ship, leaving me to whatever fate held in store. I crossed the hot sand of the beach, passed along under the cool of the palms, and began making my way inland.

So far, absolute quiet prevailed on all sides. The presence of the big ship in the offing, and my own landing, apparently, had as yet remained unnoticed. This was strange. In my mind's eye I had pictured a vastly different reception.

Now my trail led through a dense, tropical forest. Overhead, birds of gorgeous hues flew about, vivid, multicolored streaks of light. Big yellow parrots peeked down at me in dumb wonderment, and with none of the noisy chatter customary with their kind. The stillness was not only unexplainable; it was uncanny. Then, from some far, distant point inland I heard a sort of muffled shouting, as of many voices raised in sudden uproar. Then came another sound—the report of a cannon.

Could it be that the natives of Fantii were fighting a tribal war?

I hurried toward an opening in the forest on ahead; and there, from a slight elevation, I looked out across a verdant valley to a great, smooth plain beyond. A multitude had gathered there, restless, excited evidently, seeming in the distance like a huge ant family aroused by some event to a state of busy, nervous energy. Now, most astonishing of all, I beheld a balloon floating aloft over the multitude. Instead of a basket attached it sustained a sort of platform. On this I could make out the form of a native standing erect and waving some kind of flag or banner. Beside him on the platform was something which glowed and glittered in the bright sunlight—a small brass cannon, the report of which, evidently, I had heard from the depths of the forest.

The balloon was attached to a long cable; even now this was winding in, and the balloon drew nearer and nearer to earth again.

I had prepared myself for strange sights and doings on the isle of Fantii, but nothing equal to this. I emerged from the border of the forest and started off across the valley toward the gathering throng on the plain. Suddenly, in rounding a turn in the trail, I came full upon a Fantii native. He was a little, wrinkled old man, and he was hobbling along so intent on reaching the place for which I, too, was heading that I was upon him almost before either of us was aware of it.

He paused, turned and looked at me, then gazed off across the valley, as though dubious whether the business ahead would permit of his pausing to form my acquaintance. Evidently the sight of a white man caused but little wonderment, and even less interest, on Fantii. I was at a loss how to address him, forgetting what the captain had told me concerning English being un-

derstood and spoken throughout the South Sea isles. He was first to break the silence. "You come soon, sir," he said passively, "in response to the signals."

I looked at him wonderingly. "What signals?"

It was his turn to be surprised. "Don't you know?" he asked. "To-day the baseball team from the island of Fhu-boo-loo, the Sharks, comes over to play our own Fantii team, the Seals. The balloon, the red flag, the cannon—all that was to let the neighboring islands know of the great game."

"Wouldn't they have known otherwise?"

He grinned amiably. "Sure they would; every isle within seventy miles knew all about it."

"Then why the signals?"

"That's King Magoo's way—to make a flash; to pull something different from any other king around this neck of woods. I tell you it makes the biggest kind of hit——"

"I think I should like to see this game," I broke in.

He was hobbling off down the trail now, as fast as his old legs would carry him; and he called back over his shoulder: "Well, son, if you're going with me, you'll have to get a move on; I'm going to be on hand to see the practice before the game starts."

CHAPTER III.

STRIKING A BARGAIN.

FILLED with wonder, I fell in beside the old man, and together we set forth down the trail.

"So the Fhu-boo-loo Sharks play here to-day?" I said, by way of observation, as we hurried along. "How are the Sharks—a nice class?"

"Yep."

"Better than the Seals?"

"That depends," answered my ancient guide sagely, "whether you take it

from a Fhu-boo-loo or a Fantii standpoint. In the race for the Interisland League pennant, now drawing to a close, the two teams are but a few points apart."

"And to-day's game?"

"King Maori, ruler of Fhu-boo-loo, wants to take the game to-day; if he does, the Sharks and Seals will be tied for first place. The game for the championship and the pennant games must then be played off later."

"And you," I said, "of course you're for the Seals——"

"Yes. Like hundreds of others here on Fantii, I bet all I own on the Seals to cop the bunting; they—they must do it; not just because of our wagers, but we'd never hear the last of it from that old braggart, King Maori, and his chesty Loos, if they win the pennant."

We hurried on in silence for a while, then I asked abruptly: "Your name, my friend?"

He answered: "Umpoolaikharjh Boohl——"

"That's enough; I'll just call you Ump for short. Now, Ump, do you know why I'm here on Fantii?"

He hobbled straight ahead, but he looked me over meanwhile; then, blinking his little, beady eyes, he answered shrewdly: "Well, son, I've got sort of a sneakin' idea."

"Let's have it, then. I'll give it to you straight about whether you're right or not."

He didn't speak at once, seemingly busy with his thoughts; then he replied: "Just about a year ago, a young white man landed on Fhu-boo-loo. He was good looking, of pleasing manners—in fact, a good scout——"

"Good scout?" I repeated, wondering if there could be a double meaning to his words.

"Yes," he resumed, "good scout is right; for that is exactly what he was—a scout from the American League."

"Is it possible!"

"Surest thing you know! He got on the right side of old King Maori—and he got away from Fhu-boo-loo with O'Reilly, the best shortstop that ever scooped 'em up over the Interisland circuit. Maori was sore; the Loos were mad as hornets——"

"Well, Ump," I broke in innocently, "what has all this to do with my being on Fantii?"

He blinked his old eyes and grinned knowingly. He rubbed a forefinger against the side of his nose and gazed over at me with subtle understanding. "You didn't come to Fantii," he said dryly, "to take pictures of the scenery."

I concluded that this was a party with whom it would be foolish to attempt to dissemble. It would be better to gain his confidence and good will; to join forces with him, if possible. "Ump," I said, "you're right; you called the turn on me. I came to Fantii to secure a ball player; if there is a third sacker on this island worth having, I mean to take him away with me if he will consent to go——"

"It can't be done!"

"Listen, Ump," I went on. "You say you want the Seals to win the flag—that you've got everything you possess staked on the championship; you want to see King Maori beaten. Well, I'm the man who can bring this thing about and——"

"You!"

"Yes, me—Harold Fogarty, at your service. Now, Ump, there are a whole lot of things I don't know; you yourself could doubtless teach me many things—how to handle a canoe, how to exist in a big forest, with no resources but a bow and arrow, and all that. But there is one thing I do know, Ump, and that's baseball. I can take hold of those Seals and whip them into a machine that will smash the best team King Maori can trot out. I'll put them in a shape that will make copping the old pennant a dead cinch——"

"You can? You will do this—for Fantii?" he gasped fervidly. He had stopped his jogging, and now stood looking up into my face with eager intensity. "Are you sure?"

"Positive. And in return—can I depend upon you, Ump, and your help?"

He held forth his gnarled old hand. I grasped it, and I knew our pact was binding. "If I am to help you, Fogarty," he said, making no move toward renewing our walk, "I must begin right now, and at the start must tell you something that will perhaps not be pleasing——"

"Out with it!"

"Well, you must go no farther down this trail with me to-day."

"You mean that——"

"That you cannot see to-day's game."

"But I want to see it, to get a line on the players——"

"Yes—and let these two rulers, Maori and Magoo, get a line on you!"

"You believe they would suspect something if I attended the game?"

"Maori would—soon as he clapped eyes on you! He'd put Magoo next. You'd be as popular on Fantii as a wet dog in bed. No, if you want to get hold of a Fantii player, you've got to play your cards right. If the Seals win to-day—why, we won't need your help. If they lose, we'll need it very much for the deciding game. You see King Magoo to-morrow morning—not before."

He led me off the trail to a sheltered cluster of trees resembling our own eucalyptus, in one of which was a small bower, high up in the air. "Sorry, Harold," said my guide and adviser, "but I must ask you to stay here for the present. I'll come back right after the game; I'll bring you the score—and food and drink. Now, climb up into your tree house; see what you can of the game; but for the love of Kerrigan don't fall out and break your neck—until you've coached enough inside stuff

into the Seals to enable them to put the Indian sign on old Maori's Fhu-boo-loo Sharks."

I turned to remonstrate with him further, but already he was hobbling on down the trail which led to Fantii's ball park.

CHAPTER IV.

A DASH OF ROYAL SCORN.

THERE are better ways to enjoy a ball game than in a swaying tree house a mile and a half from the grand stand.

The afternoon dragged; it seemed of interminable length. Of course, from that distance I could get no idea of how the game was going; nor could I so much as distinguish which was the home team, and which the visiting Sharks. From every indication discernible from my perch, however, the contest was sizzling hot, and bitterly fought to the finish.

Finally it ended and the multitude began dispersing. About twenty minutes later, I saw my newly acquired Fantii friend Ump toiling slowly back up the trail. Then I knew how the game had gone. One look at his forlorn aspect was enough. When he neared the vicinity of my bower, I climbed down to greet him. He was in a sad state mentally. "Fogarty, we fought 'em best we could," he said, reaching my side, "and lost. Now we must pass the buck to you."

"You'll play safe in doing so," I replied confidently.

He handed over a bag made of fiber bark, and inside I found food—yams, fresh dates, and a coconut which was both food and drink. We sat down upon the ground, and I began my repast, for I was hungry. "What was the score?" I asked presently.

"Six to four—Sharks," he answered sadly. "We would have at least held them to a tie except for a couple of boners by our infield."

He was so miserable my heart went out to him. "So the Loos sort of showed the Seals up, eh?" I said, trying to cheer him. "Well, Ump, the championship game still remains to be played; the Fantii's haven't lost the pennant yet, old scout. To-morrow I'm going to sit in and draw cards in this sportive tribal mix. King Magoo willing, I will take over the frisky Fantii's and make a regular team out of 'em; we'll show these Fhu-boo-loo wallopers where to head in."

"Mebbe," he answered dispiritedly.

We spent that night at the tree house; and the next morning, after getting all the necessary information from Ump possible, I set forth for the other side of the island, the populated portion, for a visit to King Magoo, ruler of Fantii.

The natives whom I met on the way seemed but mildly interested in my presence, evidently taking me for a trader come to purchase copra from the king. Early as was my call at the palace, the ruler was already up and away for morning practice at the ball park, toward which I now directed my steps.

Once inside the high-fence inclosure, I beheld as pretty a diamond as any fan or player could wish to see. The grand stand, however, was a rambling, uncovered affair; it was hard to determine where its boundaries extended, and where the bleacher section, adjoining, commenced.

A regulation game was being played, the contestants being the first and second teams of Fantii. I explained to an attendant that I desired to interview the king. He led me through a labyrinth of passageways beneath the grand stand, and we finally emerged at a point directly behind the royal box.

King Magoo, as I now beheld him, would scarcely be considered a veritable Apollo Belvedere. He was far too short in the waist, and far too long in the legs to take any prizes for physical beauty. One of his eyes was prone

to turn outward at times, entirely irrespective of the angle of vision being taken, meanwhile, by its mate. His nose was short, and turned up at the end. He was excessively thin, loose-jointed, stoop-shouldered, and knock-kneed. Aside from these few defects, the ruler of Fantii was not bad to look at at all.

This was the individual to whom the attendant brought me. The king, who had been leaning far down over the side of the box, directing certain plays, gave one look at me, then resumed his coaching with doubled intensity, ignoring my presence entirely.

"Morning, king!" I exclaimed cheerily. "How's things breaking for you to-day?"

He gave no heed. Then I got angry. "Pretty busy coaching, eh? Well, from the way that regular ball team of King Maori's took your dubs into camp yesterday, I rather think they need a little coaching!"

He turned and glared at me; then he turned again toward the diamond; but he spoke no word to me.

I sat down to watch the players. In another minute I was so absorbed in the play out there in front that I forgot entirely both the royal presence and the royal snub. Play? Man, how those brunet bushers could field, run bases, and lambaste the ball! It was a joy to behold them, a revelation. I gave the player at third the once over, then I could hardly take my eyes from him. He was making stops little short of marvelous, yet doing it so easily one could hardly believe the chances he accepted were difficult ones. And field? He was here, there, everywhere, covering a world of territory. I thought to myself: "If old Larry could only see that young buckoo——"

At that instant a batter laid onto a slow one and laced out a sizzling drive just over the third sack. It was fair by only a few inches; it looked good for two bases. But the third baseman

made a running jump for the line, speared the ball with one hand, then from a hard position shot it over to first on a line, catching the fleet-footed runner by yards!

It was nice work, marvelous work. I jumped to my feet, no longer a wily scout, but a raving, irresponsible fan. "As nice a play as I ever saw pulled off on a diamond!" I exclaimed to a man in the box back of us. "That player's a star—a phenom! What's his name?"

"Maloney," the party addressed answered me civilly.

Then, overcome by foolish impetuosity, I turned to the ruler of Fantii. "King Magoo, I've come thousands of miles in quest of a third baseman," I began fervidly. "I've found the bird I'm after; his name's Maloney. Name your price—ask what you will, and I'll pay it. But Maloney's mine and goes back with me!"

The ruler of Fantii arose full height and faced me; then he spoke, and at the calm chill in his tones my heart sank. "Funny noise!" said King Magoo.

CHAPTER V.

JUST THINK OF THAT!

THOUGH the ruler of Fantii had spoken just two words to me, we had already arrived at a thorough understanding of each other. He knew what purpose brought me to Fantii; his energies would all be centered to thwart that purpose undoubtedly. I had bungled the affair from the beginning of our acquaintance. Because of my want of tact and finesse, I deserved to fail; still, I found myself more determined than ever to succeed in my mission.

I sat there, silently studying this strange personality—King Magoo. How was I to gain an opening? What was his particular weakness? Was there a flaw to be found in his hastily donned armor of defense, the indifference and

apathy toward me which he now assumed?

Fortunately I found a vulnerable point almost at once. I began to extol his players; I was lavish in my praise, as, indeed, it was easy to be, watching the brilliant plays there on the diamond before us. He began to thaw perceptibly under the fire of my ardent observations. "King Magoo," I said, "for the life of me I can't understand how the Loos could have taken this first team of yours into camp yesterday. Those Fhu-boo-loo Sharks must be wonders to get away with the big end of it against a team like the Seals!"

"They are good," he admitted grudgingly.

"And the Fantiis——"

"Are better."

"Then why the defeat of yesterday?"

He looked off across the field to where the captive signal balloon bobbed this way and that, straining at the cable which held it. Then he answered me: "Why were we beaten? Because my men were not in best form."

"You mean they failed to play in true form?"

"I mean they were physically unfit."

"How?"

"Too fat, for one thing; but I'm going to regulate that myself."

"In what way?"

"Start a training table, beginning tomorrow. A week from to-day we play the Loos again; that game will decide the pennant. My Fantiis will not be too fat when next they meet the Sharks. Leave it to me!"

I felt like laughing outright at the expression of grim determination which came over his countenance. Instead, I remarked: "Not a bad idea, perhaps, at that, king. The winning of the Inter-island championship means very much to you, of course?"

"Yes, naturally."

The moment was at hand for me to make a bold attempt. "Well, King Ma-

goo," I began, "you've got a swell team. That training-table idea of yours will doubtless help wonderfully in rounding them into shape; but they need a little something else, too."

"Yes? What?"

"They need some good stiff coaching on teamwork and inside play."

"U-mm!"

"They do. Now, I could take these Seals and by this time next week have them twenty per cent faster than they are now."

I could see that I had him going; he was beginning to enthuse despite himself. I went on hurriedly: "I'll make a machine out of your Seals that'll come down the stretch like Dan Patch behind a wind shield. Say, we'll bust into those Loos—and flatten 'em out so that King Maori can use 'em for linoleum when he gets back to Fhu-boo-loo——"

"Yes—yes. Go on, go on!"

He jumped to his feet and began striding to and fro across the box, his dangling hands folded behind his back. I went on wildly: "Old Maori will be chasing up and down the side lines till his feet get as thin as dimes. No use! Folks from all the neighboring islands will be calling out: 'King Magoo! King Magoo!' You won't pay much attention to 'em; but there in the royal box you'll sit like Jess Willard at a Japanese tea party——"

"Yes—yes!"

"And in return for all this, king—you will give me Maloney."

He sat down again abruptly. "Is it a bargain?" I asked.

He eyed me searchingly before replying: "Some time ago a young fellow came to the island of Fhu-boo-loo with just some sort of fool proposition like that, and he beat Maori out of a perfectly good shortstop! I know at the time I was tickled half to death at the way that young scout put the foolers on the ruler of Fhu-boo-loo; it was a

fine joke! Still, I don't want any doings like that on my island——"

"Why, king," I broke in, "remember that was Maori who was fooled; but with you—well, no one would be so silly as to try to put anything over on you!"

"No, that's true, too," he said.

He was slipping. I put the skids under him a little farther: "Think of the fortune to be made on the bets, King Magoo, when I've got the Seals coached into unbeatable form. Think of that!"

"And—and how about my training table?" he queried, making a last faltering stand.

"The training table? Oh, you must attend to that; I want to feel that I can depend upon you to look after the training table. Can I?"

"You bet you can! And, Fogarty"—I had slipped him my card—"Maloney is yours—if we cop the flag. Shake!"

It took skillful handling, a clever play of line, reel, and gaff, but he was landed at last.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD MAN TROUBLE AHEAD.

THE week which followed was both a busy and a trying one for me. I had to gain the good will of the Fantii populace first of all, and the respect and confidence of the players themselves. That much accomplished, I set to work in earnest developing the team.

Those Seals were a source of never-ending surprise and delight to me. They were quick to grasp new plays, and eager and anxious to learn more. And Maloney—it was surely a treat to see him in action. Tall and straight, lean, agile as a panther, and endowed with that intuitive faculty which enabled him somehow to play for every batter with almost uncanny precision. I knew I had in him the man Manager Larry yearned to possess. In color he was nearly white; his features were

regular; and on or off the ball field he was a gentleman at all times.

I lost no time in seeking him out and having a little heart-to-heart talk with him. His dark eyes shone when I told him of my plans to take him back with me; of how he would spend a single season in the Watermelon League, most likely, and then be drafted to the majors. But, oh, the despair in his voice when he confided to me his belief that, despite King Magoo's word of promise, he would never be allowed to depart from Fantii.

"You leave that to me, Maloney," I told him. "We'll both go away from here when the time comes, and we'll go away together." Good old Maloney! His yearning to go was intense, his natural ability as a ball player so great and pronounced, I felt that it would be a shame indeed if things did eventually turn out in such a manner that to make a get-away with him from Fantii would be impossible.

Now a word about that puerile, inane conception of King Magoo's—a training table. To begin with, those frisky Fantii Seals needed a training table about as much as a mud turtle needs feathers. Still, it was the king's pet, hobby; for the time being, his chief obsession. He didn't interfere with my ideas and methods of training; surely I could be generous enough not to clash with his—at least not openly. But it was laughable, at that.

I remember strolling around to the training camp one noon during the king's absence. The Seal-players were lounging around, fanning and recounting their joys and sorrows, real and imaginary. The chief subject of conversation, however, seemed to be dietetics.

"What did you draw for lunch, Heine?" I heard my shortstop ask the center fielder.

"Well, Joe," came the answer, "I

didn't have a thing but the hind leg of a hippopotamus."

"Aw, g'wan!"

"Fact! An' that old hippo was so tough he must, when living, have been afraid of himself. What sort of hand-out did the king dish you?"

"Me? Oh, I got a top sirlöin from a spavined, superannuated giraffe."

"You don't tell me!"

"I sure did. And I could almost bite it. Say, I know nothin' of the life habits of that particular cameleopard, but whatever they are, he was old enough to know better. What's on for supper, d'ye reckon?"

"Oh, I dunno. A joint of venison, mebbe—or bear. Perhaps a sliver of planked elephant."

I could make nothing out of such talk. Hippopotamus, giraffe, venison, bear, elephant! Was it King Magoo's idea to place his men on a strictly meat diet?

Maloney came up to me then, and in doleful manner held out his hand. "Look!" he said. "That's the kind of junk we've got to live on for a week—to reduce, and to stimulate energy. King's orders."

I looked into his outstretched palm and gasped: "Animal crackers!"

"Yep."

"Where did they come from?"

"The old boy's got four barrels of 'em cached somewhere; got 'em from a trader; and they're ancient and musty—and harder than a bride's biscuits!"

"And he plans to make you fellows live on animal crackers alone for a solid week?"

"That's his idea."

I sat down then, and laughed till the tears came. Taking pity at length, however, on the hungry, sad-eyed group around me, I said, in low tones: "You bucks go ahead and make a stall at eating that truck—that menagerie; do anything you want to with your animals—except eat 'em! Then every day, each

of you give me your personal order—anything you want that's to be had on this island—and you'll get it. My old friend Ump will smuggle it in to you."

They started a gladsome shout, but I cut them short. "There you go!" I exclaimed. "Do you want his royal nibs, King Magoo, to get next? Now a little of the soft stuff on this all the way along—or it'll be back to the menagerie diet for you!" That quieted them; but they looked both thanks and gratitude from their soulful eyes.

I left them shortly; and a little while later good, faithful Ump sneaked in to them a regular meal. You should have seen how those stuffed Seals played ball that afternoon; the Boston Reds couldn't have stopped them.

Of course his royal giblets, King Magoo, was out to see the practice game. He was in a grouch when he first came out, and his face hung down like the Malay Peninsula from the map of Asia; but when he saw how the rejuvenated Seals were cavorting around over the lot, his countenance began taking on the high lights. He assumed ninety-nine per cent of the credit. What was over, I suppose, went to me, though he didn't say so.

"You see, Fogarty?" he said. "They're getting into form now, eh? They're a different team already. What do you think now of my training-table diet and discipline? Honest, now, what do you think of it?"

"Great stuff, king!" I answered, and I turned away to hide a grin.

By Thursday, thanks to Manager Magoo's training table, Ump's shrewdness, and prompt delivery of commissary supplies, and my own humble efforts as coach, the Fantii Seals were going at top speed. The Fantii populace knew it, too. Every coin, every bead and piece of ivory they could get their hands on, honestly or otherwise, they wagered on the Seals to win from the Sharks on the coming Saturday.

In fact, things were breaking nicely; even better than I had dared hope for. But Old Man Trouble was waiting to nip me, looming up plainer every minute. Not over the distant, purple Fantii hills, but right close at hand. It was late Thursday night when Ump sought me out and imparted the dire tidings. "Be on your guard, Mr. Fogarty," he whispered hoarsely. "The king is plotting against you."

"No!"

"He is; he's plotting to double cross you and Maloney both."

"What do you mean, Ump?" I queried.

He peeked out of the door of my bungalow to make sure we would not be overheard, then resumed hurriedly: "I have learned this much—no matter how the big game goes Saturday, you lose."

"Me? How?"

"Sunday morning, early, you are to be made a prisoner, then kept in solitary confinement until a chance comes to shanghai you to some passing trader. You won't be molested until the game is over; the king is smart enough to see he needs you that long. But Sunday morning——"

"Thanks, Ump," I said. "That being the case, my coup will be staged for Saturday."

CHAPTER VII.

A MISSION OF MYSTERY.

THE next morning—Friday—there was an unusual commotion down at the shore on the side of the island nearest the palace. Some one, of no small importance evidently, was landing. In company with Maloney, I followed the crowd down that way to ascertain what it was all about.

A small launch had fastened to the pier; the visitors—there were five in the party—proceeded inland toward the palace.

Foremost walked in benign dignity an individual of patriarchal appearance,

whose flowing white beard reached down to the waist of his purple robe which served him as tunic and mantle. There was something both of courtliness and kindly benevolence in his bearing. I felt drawn to him as strangely as I had been instantly repelled on first contact with King Magoo. "Who is he?" I asked Maloney.

"King Albertus, ruler of Roo," he answered.

"And where and what is Roo?"

"An island fourteen miles from here. Albertus never had much use for King Magoo; wonder what he's doing over here to-day?"

Now we saw the ruler of Fantii, with a number of courtiers, coming down from the palace to meet the visitors; beholding which, King Albertus and his retinue came to a halt, awaiting them at a point not far from where we stood. The greeting of the two monarchs was characteristic; one simple, straightforward, courtly; the other pompous, crafty, and wearing an expression as nearly imbued with arrogance as his unreliable and flitting orbs would permit.

The greeting over, the visiting monarch for the first time seemed to lose his air of habitual complacency; he appeared embarrassed. When he began speaking, he did so almost shamefacedly. "Your majesty," he faltered, "I have come on a mission for which, it appears, I am poorly fitted. Only a parent's love for an offspring could bring me to do this——"

"Well, well, let's have it!" broke in King Magoo boorishly.

The ruler of Roo resumed: "I have an only son——"

"Yes—yes! Prince Paul?"

"Yes, Prince Paul. And here is another fact which you well know, King Magoo: that the crown jewels of the island of Roo are the most wonderful and dazzling in all the isles of the southern seas."

King Magoo's eyes narrowed to mere evil points of light. His skinny fingers worked convulsively into the palms of his sweaty hands. It was with an effort he restrained his emotion when he spoke: "Well, well—what of that, King Albertus? Have you come over here merely to brag of your crown jewels—"

"No, not to brag of them, your majesty," replied Albertus humbly, "but to offer them to you, providing that you will——"

He paused, for King Magoo's manner suddenly underwent a wondrous change. Before, he was supercilious and gruffly domineering; now he became repulsively servile and groveling. "My dear King Albertus," he began, in oily tones, and placing his arm around the venerable visitor, "I see that you have something of great, of vast, importance to impart to me. Let us go on up to the palace—just you and I alone—where we may talk in peace and privacy. It may be, my dear Albertus, I might be able to aid you."

With evident reluctance, the ruler of Roo allowed himself to be led away by the obsequious King Magoo. Maloney looked at me, his eyes round with wonderment. "Well, what d'yuh know about that!" he gasped. At that moment Ump joined us; I turned to him eagerly. "Ump, you've been a good and true friend since I've been on Fantii; I won't forget it. Now I must rely upon you again, Ump——"

"Speak, Mr. Fogarty."

"There's some sort of tricky doings about to take place on this island. Somehow I feel that Maloney and I are both vitally concerned. King Albertus is mixed up in it in some manner; but if it's a crooked deal, I know that he is being forced into it. Right here is where we've got to horn into the game and save both him and ourselves."

"But what is the scheme——"

"That's what I don't know, Ump," I answered, "and what you're to find out."

"But when—how?"

"Right now."

"Well, I'm ready."

"Then beat it up to the palace; get in somehow! Stick around under some pretext until you've learned what this mysterious mission means. Report to me to-morrow morning, at the very latest. And another thing, my dear Umpoolaikharjh——"

But already he had turned and was hobbling away toward the palace in a praiseworthy endeavor to beat the two rulers to it.

CHAPTER VIII.

DELAYED IN TRANSIT.

AN hour later, I was out with the Seals at the ball park; but my thoughts flew back constantly to the palace, where I knew that a kindly, honorable old king was being inveigled into the greedy meshes of a monarch neither kindly nor honorable.

What had brought Albertus of Roo over to Fantii just at this crucial time—and on an errand the nature of which was surely at variance with his conception of right and wrong? Would Ump succeed in learning?

It may have been due to my mood, but it seemed to me the Seals that morning played like a lot of befuddled bushers. Even Maloney fielded miserably and booted the ball with whole-souled persistency; his heaves across to first were as weird and wide of the mark as those of an irate female flinging at a busy bunch of visiting poultry. Still, this did not worry me so much. I had seen teams play like that before on the eve of a great battle, and then go in and win without a bobble. It was just the uncertainty of things in general, I presume, that was beginning to irritate me; the fact, perhaps, that a

time limit had been set on my liberty and activities.

During the week I had secret emissaries over on the island of Fhu-boo-loo—eight miles distant—getting a line on King Maori's team. They reported that the Sharks were taking things easy, doing only enough work to keep in form, seemingly confident of their ability to win the coveted bunting. But to-day there came back a more startling report that Maori had signed up a new pitcher—touted as a speed marvel and wonder—to be used against us in Saturday's game. This much my scouts had gleaned over there; but they failed to gather the all-important information as to the identity of this new slab artist and whence he came.

Another report brought back was that a certain great personage from a distant island—the King of Mandalore—was coming to witness the contest. He was planning to bring with him a large following—his daughter, the princess of Mandalore, and a goodly amount of ivory, jewels, and coin, which would be placed at the best odds obtainable on the Fhu-boo-loo Sharks to win.

Now I had heard a great deal about this King of Mandalore; that, though very rich, he was very miserly. So, if he were willing to risk so great a part of his possessions on the result of the game, I knew he must imagine he had a little inside information. This same ruler—so I was told—though keenly interested in sports, had never been known to wager so much as a blue bead before, through fear he might lose. Now the old miser was betting the limit on the Sharks, throwing caution to the winds! Here was another mystery: Where did the King of Mandalore get the tip he was playing so strong? Was he staking all on Maori's new south-paw? It looked as if there might be something in the tales of prowess told of this young flinger, after all.

Well, I was pleased to note that none of these rumors and reports fazed my Seals—not a little bit. They had trained hard, were living on fighting rations—with animal crackers as a side diversion—and they were coached to the minute on stuff they knew the Sharks didn't have; they knew they could win, no matter who faced them. Needless to say, I felt much the same way. I had some box talent myself, in young York. If he were working right, I felt certain he'd have them breaking their backs reaching for his speedy shoots and slow fade-aways.

From Maloney's latest showing I concluded he might be getting a trifle too much on edge; I decided to take him on a long hike to get his thoughts away from the game. Right after practice and shower, we started out alone; or, rather, we contemplated starting alone. But we were soon apprised of the fact that others were out for an airing as well as ourselves. If we went along the high crags skirting the north shore, we were sure ever and anon to come upon some Fantii warrior—just lolling around doing nothing in particular, but armed to the teeth. When we sought the foothills, it was the same. Turn which way we might, we came upon King Magoo's hirelings, looking inordinately foolish in their attempts to appear wholly oblivious of our presence, but there just the same.

"Let's go back, Maloney!" I exclaimed, in disgust, at length. "We've got about as much chance here to be left to our own affairs and devices as a demonstrator in a store window."

It was depressing. What chance had we to escape from Fantii—when the time finally arrived for us to attempt such escape—if spies were ever around us; if every minute we were watched and guarded by the keen-eyed, armed warriors of King Magoo?

We returned to my bungalow. As we approached it, after a brisk hike,

we beheld old Ump running toward us. His arms were flying like flails; his tattered raiment fluttered in the wind. But on his honest old face was a look of supreme satisfaction. Even at some distance we could see his grin of welcome and eager anticipation.

"Good old Ump!" I exclaimed. "He's been right on the job. He's got news to tell us."

Then, even as we watched, an armed guard stepped out into the trail directly in front of our zealous but scarcely circumspect messenger. All the radiant joy left Ump's being; he seemed to wilt in the grasp of the big guard who carried him away without ado or ceremony.

The message he was bringing to us perforce must wait, delayed in transit.

CHAPTER IX.

TO THE BEATING OF DRUMS.

I WAS awakened at what seemed an early hour the following morning by the reverberations of the brass signal cannon. Hurriedly donning my clothes, I went outside.

Over at the ball park, the balloon was floating aloft and straining at the cable, while an ardent attendant stood forth on the platform and wigwagged the information to countless multitudes—who already knew about it—that a ball game was about to be fought out on Fantii.

That balloon stunt, next to animal crackers for a training-table diet, was about the craziest farce of utter foolishness I ever heard of. Oh, well, it was good press-agent stuff at that, perhaps. I am sure I have no quarrel with King Magoo regarding that old, big, bobbing balloon.

At the request of King Maori, early in the week, the time for the game had been advanced to nine o'clock. Even now throngs were beginning to pour inland from the shore, arriving in every imaginable form of seagoing craft from

war canoes to trawlers. From every direction off Fantii they came; and they brought goods to wager, some favoring the Seals, some the Sharks. I think, however, the betting element leaned toward King Maori's team.

There was nothing shy nor timidly retiring about those virile visitors from the neighboring isles. They were out for a hilarious jamboree. Their idea of how to start a good time was to begin with plenty of noise, then letting things unfold with ever-increasing celerity up to the final knock-out.

I had breakfast, even though not hungry, for I figured that a famous day on Fantii was ahead.

Over at the training camp I found the Seals awaiting me. Just as I came on the scene, an added tumult arose down at the shore, accompanied by beating drums, hoarse shouts, and vaunting war cries. King Maori, his court, the Sharks, and the eager, frenzied populace of Fhu-boo-loo were landing.

King Magoo joined us. He was about as cool and collected as a sweet girl graduate occupying stage center, mentally groping for words which had flown away in disgraceful flight. "Come on now, boys!" he called out. "Get ready; we're going to have a parade. We're going to lead King Maori and the visiting team to the grounds."

Thirty minutes later we were at the ball park; and then I got my first close-up glimpse of King Maori and the scrappy Sharks of Fhu-boo-loo.

Maori was a large, portly individual of rather pleasing personality. He had a self-satisfied expression; it was easy to see that the ruler of Fhu-boo-loo by no means hated himself. When he smiled, which was frequently, the bright sunshine gleamed back from his gold teeth. I sized him up as being a pretty good sort of chap; one who would revel in a sizzling ball game from the "Play ball!" to the last "You're out!"

I had heard some hard tales concerning this jovial-looking monarch. Judging merely from his appearance now, I decided that they were gross exaggerations.

With his retinue, he was to occupy the box adjoining that of King Magoo on the right; to which location, to my satisfaction, the two monarchs at once proceeded; for I didn't want Maori or any visiting islander to notice me in particular.

As for the Sharks—well, just one peep at them in action, clear-eyed, clean-limbed young panthers, and I knew that we held no copper-riveted cinch on the Interisland pennant. If we won from those speedy huskies, it would be only after the fiercest kind of a mix. No wonder Maori could lean back in his box looking so complacently serene. The Sharks were good—no doubt of it. Just how much real baseball they knew, of course, I had yet to be shown.

We took our places on the players' bench, letting the Sharks have the field first for practice.

Just then I noticed the balloon attendant reloading the brass cannon. He seemed to be putting in a double charge of powder. "What's the idea?" I asked Maloney. "Isn't this the last game of the season?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Then why the need of loading the howitzer?"

The third baseman grinned. "King Magoo," he said, "is getting ready to fire the salute of victory."

I looked out on the diamond at those speed-demon Sharks.

"Well," I said, "he better shoot it off now and run no chances."

The grand stand and bleachers were filling rapidly; the crowd was beginning to surge out into a roped-off section of the field.

There was a commotion in the box at the left of King Magoo's; those

throughout certain sections of the grand stand arose, and for a moment remained standing, with heads uncovered. I saw a slip of a girl, radiantly beautiful, and dressed all in white, making her way daintily to a seat in the front of the box.

"The princess of Mandalore," Maloney observed, for my information.

"So?"

"Yep. The fat man behind her is the king."

Well, she certainly was a pretty little princess, and she seemed to be just as nice and lovable as she was pretty.

A gong rang. The Seals took the field for fifteen minutes' practice. On the way out, Joe Muldoon—my short-stop and field captain—stopped in front of where I sat at the end of the bench. "I've got the dope," he said to me knowingly.

"What dope?" I asked.

"I'm wise to who they're goin' to put in."

"To pitch?"

"Yes."

"Who is it, Joe?" I queried eagerly.

He bent over closer to me. "The best there is on the South Sea isles. He is——"

"Well?"

"Prince Paul, son of King Albertus, ruler of Roo."

CHAPTER X.

SOME ROYAL SCHEMES.

THE game started in a quarter of an hour, with the Sharks at bat. The cheering and shouts of frantic fans died away for the moment, and a hush of expectation fell upon rulers and rooters alike. A pennant was at stake.

The first batter up, after having two strikes called on him, singled sharply over second. Fhu-boo-loo rooters started a shout, but it ended in a groan. The runner, taking too long a lead off first, was caught by a quick snap from

York. The next two batters were retired on strikes. The young Fantii pitcher got a good hand as he walked to the bench.

The Seals came to bat, and now it was the visiting pitcher who received applause! It amounted to an ovation. It came from all parts, grand stand and bleachers alike. Plainly Prince Paul was a favorite.

He stood out there on the mound, a tall, slender stripling, exceedingly fair for an islander, and with blue eyes which seemed to gleam with much of his father's kindness, to which was added a glint of determination and resolution—qualities, perhaps, in which the parent was a few points shy.

As he stood ready to deliver the ball, a striking, handsome figure, intense, yet utterly without affectation, I could not help admiring the young prince.

Still I was not on the Fantii bench to glorify opposing pitchers, and to our first batter up I shouted: "Come on now, Hank—hook onto one! Get this baby right at the jump, Hank, boy! Let's send him back to the bushes, where he belongs!"

Well, I'll say this much for Hank—he tried his best. Why, that baby, as I'd called him, had our best hitter looking like a blind man swatting at a buzzing bluebottle fly with a pillow! Speed? Man, that pale, slender chap was just burning 'em through!

"What's he got, Hank?" I asked, as the discomfited slugger rejoined us.

"Got! How do I know?" he answered.

"Weren't you just up there?"

"Sure I was up there," he answered, "but I didn't see nuthin'."

The next two up saw a little more than Hank did, but they didn't get very far at that. The second batter was out on a puny grounder, thrown by the pitcher to first; the third went down attempting to bunt.

In the second frame, too, each side

was blanked. In the first of the third things began to happen. The first Shark up slammed the ball square on the nose. It looked good for a homer; the fastest sort of fielding by Heine, out in center, kept it down to a two-bagger. The batter who followed lined out a long single, the runner on second scoring. At this the Loo rooters started an uproar.

I looked over at King Maori. He was leaning far down over the side of his box yelling in delight, his golden teeth gleaming in the sun. "There goes yer old ball game!" he shouted over to King Magoo. "How you like it, huh?" Then, directing his attention to the batter coming up, he yelled: "Show us something now, Bjarb! Give us another hit, son; atta boy!"

Bjarb, thus implored, hit for two bases, bringing in the runner on first. I began warming up another pitcher. The next batter, however, hit into a double play. The third out was made on a sensational catch of a line drive to right. For the present, the bombardment was over, and the Sharks were two runs to the good.

Our catcher took off his protector, saying things under his breath. He came over and sat down by me. "What's ailing York?" he asked.

"I don't know. Why?"

"There wasn't a thing on the ball that whole inning but the cover."

I felt a slight pressure on my shoulder. Turning around I beheld Ump. He had crawled up there during the excitement of the previous inning. He brought me his message at last. "They had me locked up," he said, "but I got out. There is news for you—I must talk fast."

I bent over to shield him from prying eyes and to hear him without drawing the attention of any one else. "All right, Ump," I said softly, "let's have it."

He began straightway, talking in low

tones, but very rapidly: "Prince Paul and the princess of Mandalore are in love. They wanted to marry. Albertus consented—her father refused, hoping for a richer suitor. Paul was secured by Maori to pitch this game. The King of Mandalore cared nothing for his daughter's happiness, but thought he had a chance to make a rich haul. He laid plans; he sought out the ruler of Roo— Can you hear me, Fogarty?"

"Yes—go on, Ump."

"He told Albertus that if Paul wins to-day's game he can marry the princess."

"Yes—I hear."

"But the King of Mandalore wouldn't take chances, see? He tried to make Albertus promise to go to King Magoo and get him to sell the game. Albertus refused. Then the king said the stuff was all off between Paul and the princess."

"Yes—hurry, Ump!"

"Albertus got to thinking it over; he felt sorry for them young people, and through love for his son he finally agreed to do as the king said. He came to Fantii, feeling like a sheep-killing dog, but determined to help his boy. He offered King Magoo the crown jewels to throw the game. Magoo grabbed at it——"

"Wait, Ump!" I broke in. "I must watch the play now. Hide down behind the bench; tell me the rest when the side's out." Then I whispered down to him: "King Magoo has left the royal box—he is coming this way!"

My messenger crouched lower; I turned all my attention to the events out upon the diamond.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE KINGS LOOKED ON.

WHEN King Magoo reached the Fantii bench and took a place beside me, there were actually tears in

his eyes—crocodile tears. He looked all shaken up and in the depths of despair. "Breaking against us, boy," he sniveled. "It's bad, very bad!"

I wanted to get up and choke the old hypocrite; still that would hardly have done. "I'm going to take York out the next inning," I remarked.

He gave a sudden start. "Take York out? No—no, I wouldn't do that, Fogarty," he protested hastily. "York's by far the best we've got. He'll take a brace next inning——"

"He'll take a walk next inning," I corrected, "if he makes a bad start."

The king's whining tone hardened, and he cried out: "You leave York in—I demand it!"

Before I could make reply, Magoo got up and passed along the line, stopping here and there to exchange a word with the players. With York, sitting at the extreme end, he talked longer than with any of the others; then he hurried on back to his seat in the box.

That inning we did a little better. A base on balls, a steal of second, a neat sacrifice, and a single down the third-base foul line netted us one run. The Sharks came in. Ump raised up cautiously.

"How many know of King Magoo's treachery?" I asked at once. "What players are in on it?"

"Only one—Pitcher York."

Now I understood why King Magoo had just visited the players' bench. He wanted to caution York; the attempts of the young pitcher to hand the Sharks the game were too crude. He wanted the visitors to retain only such lead as would enable them to nose out ahead; but the contest must be so close and well fought that no suspicion of a frame-up would arise.

"Does Prince Paul know the game is fixed, Ump?" I asked.

"No."

"The princess?"

"No."

"Not even King Maori?"

"No."

I sat there, trying to formulate some plan to circumvent this monarch who would throw down his subjects to gain his own selfish ends. Foxy old King Magoo! He was playing out the game with only one accomplice, reducing risk of exposure to a minimum. His was a position not without actual danger should his subjects—who had wagered their all—learn how he had planned to double cross them. On the other hand, there were the dazzling crown jewels of Roo to gain for his very own. Then, too, if the Fantii Seals lost, as he now planned to make them do, he would have me on the hip. I would be the goat, and he would have the jewels. Pretty soft for him!

There were still some intricacies I could not fathom.

"Ump," I said, "the way that prince person is going, he doesn't need to have any game bought for him——"

"He can't last all the way; at least, he may not. He is just recovering from an illness. This the King of Mandalore knew; he would wager nothing until he made King Albertus fix it with Magoo so that the contest was a sure-thing gamble; then he bet the limit."

I dared not talk longer with Ump; the game demanded my attention, and I feared that some of Magoo's henchmen might spy out Ump; so I told him to lie flat and watch the game as best he could from beneath the bench.

A sudden thought came to me, and a realization that I must now be improving every passing minute. Calling Wilbur, our bat boy, over to me, I slipped a coin into his ever-willing palm and directed him to climb to the uppermost part of the grand stand, from which point of vantage a view could be had of the ocean. In five min-

utes he was back; and the information he gave me was the first break of luck to come my way for some time. His words, whispered in confidence, gave me hope renewed, and added determination.

As I half expected, York was now going great guns again. That lad certainly had the goods; too bad he hadn't been strong enough morally to withstand the wiles and selfish intrigues of the despicable Magoo. He must have been offered an immense sum to cross us as he was doing. Now he was pitching his best and he mowed the Sharks down in one-two-three order. The Fantii were up again, and determined to cut down that two-to-one lead.

As Prince Paul walked out to the mound, I saw him glance over at the pretty princess of Malandore. He was rewarded by the sight of a fluttering handkerchief and a smile that made it plain to me how he, in his weakened condition, could go in there and pitch his very heart out, as he was doing.

Through faulty support, he was now quickly in a hole, however. With none out, we scored a run, and a runner was perched on first and third. Maori came down to the Fhu-boo-loo bench—and he came on the jump.

Seeing him now, I could understand the tales I had heard of this dual-natured monarch. He was a changed being. His golden smile had vanished. He seemed fairly to radiate dynamic force and impulse. His coaching from the bench was crisp and crinkly; it bristled with sharp invectives; it cut like a whip. And, be it said, he got results. The wabby defense stiffened; he had the Sharks, in no time, as full of pep as a Mexican bill of fare, and fighting back at us all the way. Prince Paul, amid all the pandemonium and babble of battling voices, suddenly tightened and fanned the next three batters in succession. Our rally was

hit square on the nose, but we had tied up the score at that.

The struggling Sharks came to bat again. What would young York do now? Somewhat to my surprise, he handed them the best he had, which was good enough to hold them helpless, letting them down without a run. We, in our turn, were likewise blanked. Thus it rocked along until the first of the ninth; then Maori's men shoved another run across. The last frame was at hand. The Seals came up, with a handicap of a one-run lead, two runs required now to win the pennant.

Hank, our heavy-hitting, lead-off man, was up again. Either his eyesight was getting better, or Paul had less stuff on the ball, for he rapped out a nice single. A sacrifice placed him on second; a minute later he stole third. Prince Paul, plucky player that he was, was beginning to fail. He was out there fighting on his heart and nerve; his arm was gone.

He walked the next batter, unable to get the ball over with the old steam behind it. I saw King Magoo get up and start precipitously for the players' bench. The next up was Pitcher York. He fanned, of course; at this stage it was his only play. On his third strike, however, the runner on first stole second.

Two down. On the next batter depended the Interisland championship. That batter was Maloney.

The ruler of Fantii reached the third baseman as he was bending over to select a bat to use in this crisis. The king whispered fervid words into his ear. I saw Maloney straighten quickly, a look of amazement upon his face. Instantly, however, he had himself in hand again. Under pretext of finding a different bat, he came down to my end of the line. Getting close to me, he said hoarsely: "King Magoo has ordered me, under penalty of death, to strike out!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SALUTE OF VICTORY.

TIME was precious. I could only talk with Maloney hurriedly, while pretending to help him find the bat he wanted; then he jogged on out to the plate.

Strange to say, the multitude was quiet now; the suspense was too great even for riotous demonstrations; but it soon livened up again. Maori himself, now on the side lines, started things. "Hold 'em, Paul!" I heard his voice booming across the diamond. "We know you can do it, son; only a little way farther to go, lad; 'most through now, Paul, boy!"

Paul, tiring fast, delivered the ball; it went wide. The catcher dug it out of the dirt.

"Ball one!" yelled the umpire; then, in quick succession came "Ball two!" and "Ball three!" In the lull which followed I heard a plaintive voice imploring from the box next to that of King Magoo; just two words, but they were filled with emotion and pent-up entreaty: "Oh, Paul!"

Honestly, that almost got me! For a moment I wanted—— Oh, well, I recovered quickly and I bawled out to Third-baseman Maloney: "Soak it, man! Right here's where we cop the bunting. Get onto one, you islander, and ride it out where they'll never find it!"

Paul steadied himself; his catcher stood with his hands outstretched; straight for the center of the plate came the ball. Then Maloney did the unexpected, the unconventional. He lammed away at that perfect strike; likewise he connected, lacing the ball out to deep center—a sizzling two-bagger.

The supreme moment was at hand. Reaching back of me, I grasped the gnarled fingers of old Ump in fervid, though silent, farewell; then I started on the high for the far corner of the

field. The two runners ahead of Maloney scampered in home; the pennant was won for Fantii.

Looking back over my shoulder, I saw Maloney round third and head for the players' bench; the next moment, he was racing after me, breaking all speed records known. Even so, he was carrying in his arms his favorite bat, a heavy knife, and a bulging paper sack.

We reached the straining balloon—our objective—just six jumps ahead of one skinny king and one fat king, rulers respectively of the islands of Fantii and Mandalore; and about seven skips ahead of several hundred armed guards who thirsted for our blood because the aforesaid rulers demanded it. We sprang upon the platform; Maloney reached over and slashed the cable; we shot into the air.

Those below us seemed to be dropping away—those frenzied ones who sought to do us bodily harm, and that blurred scene of strife and turmoil and horrid noise kept drawing farther, farther away. Higher, higher we mounted; and there in the offing—just as Wilbur, the bat boy, had told me—rode the ship of my sea-captain friend.

A feeling of exultant exhilaration seized upon me. "Well, Maloney," I shouted, in sheer delight, "I guess that about closes our contract with the intriguing ruler of Fantii."

He looked at me and grinned. "Not yet," he answered. "You forget the salute of victory."

He stooped down and poured the contents of the paper sack into the mouth of the cannon, then with his favorite bat he rammed the paper in hard. He pointed the cannon downward at the ball park and touched it off. In another moment, there fell upon friend and foe alike—down there in the ball park—a fine mantle of powdered hippopotamus, giraffe, venison, bear, elephant—animal crackers from the training table of King Magoo.

Contempt of Court

CASEY and Flannigan, who had not seen each other for two days, met in the bar parlor of the Green Dragon the other evening.

"I hear it's mighty foine sport yez been havin' down your street, Casey," remarked Flannigan.

"Sport, is it?" Casey chuckled. "Bedad, an' we have had all that. The foineest foight yez ever saw! Tin of us hauled up before the magistrate, an' Pat Branagan foined for contimpt av court."

"An' phwat was that for, Casey?"

"Well, Pat it was that bit half Murphy's ear off, so when the magistrate was tellin' us we would all be bound over to kape the peace, Patsy burst out laughin' an' said he couldn't. Thin his honor got vexed an' said to Patsy, severelooke: 'Me man, why can't you promise to kape the peace?'"

"An' phwat did Branagan say to that?"

"He said: 'Sure, your honor, I can't kape the piece—it fell to the flure, and Murphy's dog swallowed it!'"

The One Thing Essential

THE Sunday-school teacher was talking to her pupils on patience. She explained her topic carefully, and, as an aid to understanding, she gave each pupil a card bearing the picture of a boy fishing.

"Even pleasure," she said, "requires the exercise of patience. See the boy fishing; he must sit and wait. He must be patient."

Having treated the subject very fully, she began with the simplest, most practical question: "And now can any little boy tell me what we need most when we go fishing?"

The answer was quickly shouted with one voice: "Bait!"


The Prairie Shark

By John Holden.



CHAPTER I.

A CHANCE FOR A FORTUNE.

 IN an unimproved suburb of the fastest growing city in western Canada two office employees stepped off the road to let a big, blue motor car pass. "There goes an example of what Alberta has done for those who had faith in it," said Tommy Harrow to his companion. "Dick Dexter came out here fifteen years ago with his wife and child, a team of oxen, and ten dollars in cash. He homesteaded a quarter section near what was then only a trading post, and now that same tract of land forms the best residential section of the city of Edmonton. In other words, western Canada has presented to Mr. Dexter, free of charge, land that is now assessed at about eight million dollars."

Despite the many wondrous tales he had heard of fortunes won in the vast new Canadian empire beyond the great lakes, Angus Norton was a bit skeptical. An unpleasant experience with a real-estate sharp, who had tried to sell him a town lot two miles from town, had not tended to diminish his natural caution.

"A fellow couldn't take up a homestead these days and stand a chance of having a city grow up on his land," he observed.

"Nonsense! Alberta is in its infancy. Think of the undeveloped resources; not more than one acre in a hundred is under cultivation. In the Peace River country especially dozens of town and cities will spring up when the new railroads are built. Say, did you take a look at the girl in that car?"

"Never look at them."

"You'd look at Miss Dexter if you were ever lucky enough to meet her, you crabbed old anchorite," retorted Harrow.

A smile lit up Norton's frank, winning countenance. Of lithe, symmetrical build, with clean-cut pink-and-white features strongly suggestive of athletics and cold baths, Norton was just the sort of young man who usually attracts feminine attention. That he had as yet evinced scant interest in the ladies was due, perhaps, to the fact that working his way through an Eastern university and winning an athletic championship had pretty well occupied his time before graduation, two months previously.

"What about the land lottery to-mor-

row?" Norton queried, changing the subject. "There's a chance there to make a small fortune, isn't there?"

"There certainly is," agreed Harrow, as the two men boarded a street car. "Folks will commence to get in line about midnight, I guess."

It was long before that hour, however, when the boarding-house telephone rang. "Mr. Harrow, please," the landlady called up the stairs.

Harrow went down. He returned on a run. "Get your overcoat, Norton!" he shouted. "The line's forming now. Quick! This is going to be the biggest thing ever pulled off in Alberta. Ready?" Overcoats slung over their arms, the young men dashed out into the night.

They were half a block from a street-car corner when a nocturnal trolley went clamoring through the gloom. Disdaining to wait ten minutes for another car, the fortune hunters set off downtown at a smart pace, Harrow in front, puffing like the winner of a fat man's race. Norton at his shoulder, jogging easily like the seasoned athlete that he was.

Neither spoke a word. A motor car hurtled down the street and skidded around a corner. Afar off, two men were running. A hurrying pedestrian whom they overtook broke into a trot. Except for these evidences of something doing, a peaceful quiet brooded over the dark streets.

As the two friends turned into a side street, more hurrying men were in evidence. From every direction they were coming, all headed the same way. Harrow's failing wind slowed the pair to a walk, but soon they resumed their dog-trot. Presently they rounded the final corner and came on a line of humanity that already was two blocks long. With one last burst of energy, Harrow fell exhausted into place at the line's end. Norton dropped into position behind him.

"Half these people can't buy lots," Norton remarked, after Harrow had regained his breath.

A man who had come up behind them undertook to explain. "They're all hoping to draw a low number that they can sell," he said. "You see it's like this: There's forty-eight hundred lots to be sold, some at ten thousand dollars, some as low as two thousand——"

"And the Hudson's Bay Company got all that land for nothing!" Norton exclaimed. "Land they're selling for millions of dollars."

"Sure. Pretty foxy, huh? To hang on till the city grew up all around it."

"Talk about opportunities in Alberta! I wonder if there are any left?"

"As many as ever, and more," returned the stranger. "There are fifteen hundred envelopes to be drawn, twelve hundred containing numbers, the rest blanks. The man who holds No. 1 is entitled to buy the four lots he considers best; the tenth number has tenth choice, and so on. The prices of the lots are considered low and the terms are easy; therefore, the man who draws a low number possesses something salable. They say one real-estate operator has offered ten thousand dollars in cold cash for No. 1, and there are proportionate offers for other low numbers. You or I have as good a chance to draw No. 1 as anybody."

Norton was amazed. Nothing like this could possibly happen back in Ontario.

CHAPTER II.

IN STRANGE COMPANY.

IN the mellow light of the close-to-midnight moon Norton and Harrow huddled together on the cold sidewalk, watching humanity scurry to the scene. They came in motors, buggies, and farm wagons, on bicycles and crackling motor cycles. Young men and old men were there. Hobos and men in evening dress rubbed shoulders.

Even a few women shivered in the long line.

Bootblacks and clerks raced with laborers and millionaires for places. School-teachers were there; classes forgotten. College professors cracked jokes with newsboys and peddlers. Office employees lost sight of possible discharge in the dazzling allurements of unearned riches. The gambling spirit was rampant and no class was untouched.

Youngsters who should have been in bed reaped a harvest. Boxes to sit on brought from half a dollar up. Sandwiches and hot coffee found eager purchasers at absurd prices. Blankets were a treasure beyond price as the excitement waned and the line shivered into an uncomfortable sleep. At intervals tiny bonfires snapped and crackled in ruddy good cheer, their long, yellow flames flickering into the night like dragons' tongues and throwing weird shadows on looming warehouse walls.

Norton had slipped into a half doze when a peremptory slap on the shoulder brought him back to earth. "Wake up! Quick!" Harrow yelled in his ear. "Some roughnecks are trying to break into the line. Look! Here's a couple of them coming."

Two men dashed directly at Harrow and Norton. Though he tried to put up a fight, Harrow was thrown aside. It was different with Norton. His gloved fist, with his hundred and sixty pounds of trained muscle and sinew behind it, crashed on his assailant's jaw. The man dropped like a dog. Harrow's conqueror fled.

Then a squad of policemen arrived and hauled several of the would-be usurpers off to the lockup.

As the first fiery beams of a new day streaked across the horizon the long, serpentine line took on a new lease of life. Comfort loving, moneyed men, arriving at what they considered

an early hour, purchased the places of their more alert brothers. The price of a position steadily mounted to a hundred dollars near the head of the line and from forty to sixty dollars farther back.

Speculators ranged along the sidewalk, waving bank notes, seeking what places they might reasonably hope to sell later on at a profit. Poverty-haunted men who found themselves in good places in the line thankfully exchanged their places for a week's wages in the workaday world and later berated their luck when the same places were sold for three times the amount of their windfall. Tramps who were in line addressed merchants and bankers who were not in terms of patronizing superiority.

The city virtually took a holiday. Curious crowds came to gaze at the line. People who had not realized what an opportunity the Hudson's Bay Company's sale presented bewailed their misfortune.

A speculator approached the portion of the line where Harrow and Norton stood. "Any of you fellows want to sell?" he asked. "Better make sure of the small money than lose out on the big."

"What y' offerin', boss?" an exuberant hobo wanted to know.

"Fifty cash. Are y' on?"

"Keep your small change to buy seegars, mister. Nothin' less than a hundred talks to this chicken."

"Is fifty your best offer?" asked Norton.

"Isn't it enough? Only the first hundred numbers are any good. One chance in twelve to win anything at all and only one chance in fifty to make a killing. Want to sell?"

Norton considered for a moment. People seemed to think that positions near the head of the line were more valuable than positions farther back, but he could not see it that way. The

last man to draw might get No. 1. "You can have my place for fifty dollars," he decided.

Five crisp, new ten-dollar bills in his pocket, Norton procured breakfast at a restaurant near by, carried a substantial repast to Tommy Harrow, and then sauntered leisurely down the line.

The hour for going to his office employment approached. Should he go? The siren call of easy money bade him stay. He guessed the office could get along without him for one day. Why should he throw away a chance to make a fortune? Nine o'clock found him concluding the purchase for twenty-five dollars of a position in the line two blocks behind the place he had relinquished. He noted casually that his neighbor in front was a girl, stylishly dressed and heavily veiled.

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF THE BARREL.

AT the head of the line the excitement mounted to fever heat as the opening hour drew nigh. A bombastic statement from an important personage that ten thousand dollars really awaited the drawer of ticket No. 1, did he wish to sell, tingled the line with rare ecstasy. The man at the head, basking in the limelight of enviable publicity for the first time in his insignificant life, refused five hundred dollars for his place.

Then an adjacent tower clock boomed the hour of ten, and the biggest real-estate lottery in the history of western Canada was on.

The man whose shrewdness had enabled him to head the line, who had refused half a year's wages for his chance, stepped inside the office. A blindfolded little girl reached into a huge revolving barrel, drew forth an envelope, and handed it to him. With an official at his elbow, he opened it and drew forth—a blank!

Luck was against the line leaders. Here and there a number below one hundred came to light, news of which brought cheers from the multitude, but two hours later the real prizes were still in the barrel, a fact that brought great cheer to those far back in line, Angus Norton among them.

As the long line pulsed spasmodically forward Norton found himself developing an interest in the mysterious woman in front of him. Though her heavy veil practically hid her features, he guessed that she was young and good looking. Lithe and slender, graceful, dressed expensively and in perfect taste, she seemed distinctly out of place in that nondescript company.

Evidently she was anxious concerning her identity, for when policemen and other persons drew near she averted her head. Others in line exchanged comments and more or less humorous bantering with their neighbors, but the veiled girl said nothing. She moved forward when the others moved and stopped when they stopped, like an automaton, an alluring bit of feminine mystery.

It was nearing noon when Norton purchased an old soap box. "I'm sure you must be tired," he said to the veiled girl. "Won't you take my box?"

The girl did not heed his offer immediately; but after a moment she turned suddenly and Norton knew that the heavy veil hid a bewitching countenance. "Thank you so much," she said, in a low, musical voice. "I am dreadfully tired."

"It's warm, isn't it?" Norton clumsily tried to make conversation.

"Very," the girl replied.

The line moved forward. Norton and his mysterious neighbor advanced from the shadow of a huge signboard into the fiery glare of the noonday sun.

"Aren't you hungry as well as tired?" Norton inquired solicitously. "I'm sure

we could hold your place for you while you take a little rest."

"I wonder! Are you sure the policemen won't refuse to let me back in line?"

Norton appealed to the man in front of the girl. "You'll help me hold her place, won't you?" he asked.

"Certainly," the man assured him.

The man behind Norton likewise agreed.

"I'm positive there's no danger," Norton assured the girl. "Go ahead."

"Very well, then; and thank you," she said. With an uneasy backward glance she disappeared in the crowd.

The sun swung to its most effective range, and the shimmering cement roadway radiated reflected heat. The line drooped, and the early morning mirth and jollity lagged.

CHAPTER IV.

A FORTUNE FOR NOTHING.

THE afternoon wore along and the veiled girl did not return. In front of the drawing place the crowd had grown to a mob that packed the street for blocks. Volleys of cheers punctuated the ceaseless hum of excitement as low numbers came to light, but at three o'clock, when Norton had advanced to a scant quarter block from the clap-board temple of the Goddess of Chance, seven numbers out of the first ten remained undrawn—and the girl had not returned.

A speculator waved a bunch of bills in Norton's face. "A hundred dollars for your place," he shouted.

"No, thanks. If it's worth that much to you it's worth as much to me."

The men behind and in front of Norton proved amenable to dollar persuasion, however, and relinquished their positions.

A dozen feet from Fate's dispensary the veiled girl broke through the cordon of the curious and started to take

her place in front of Angus. "My goodness!" she exclaimed. "I thought I'd never get back."

"Say! What d'ye think you're doing around here?" one of Norton's new neighbors objected.

Norton explained the circumstances.

The man, a big, coarse individual, sneered. "Nix on the hot air, fellow. People that ain't in line can't come buttin' in at the last minute. What d'ye suppose me an' me friend paid a hundred bucks for, huh? To see some dame get in for nothin' Ain't that right?" He appealed to a policeman.

"It wouldn't be fair to the others," the officer decided. "There'd be no keeping order at all if people could drop in and out of line. Sorry, but the lady has lost her place if she ever had one."

The girl trembled. Suddenly her veiled head bowed down and a filmy little handkerchief crept up under her veil.

Norton's decision was made in an instant. "Take my place!" he said, and before the girl had time either to accept or refuse he had gently pushed her into the line and disappeared in the crowd.

"I couldn't do anything else. I caused her to lose her place," he told himself with a pang of regret for his lost opportunity.

From the depths of the crowd Norton watched the line creep forward. The coarse-featured man in front of the girl tore his number into bits and angrily flung the bits away as he emerged from the office.

The girl's turn came. Through the open door Norton saw the blindfolded child pick an envelope from the barrel and hand it to her. Others saw the figure on it before she did.

"No. 3," said some one.

The news flashed through the crowd, and a volley of ear-splitting cheers greeted the girl as she left the office. A group of speculators rushed at her. "A

thousand dollars for your number, lady!" shouted one.

"Fifteen hundred!" roared another.

"Two thousand, lady!" a third voice boomed.

The girl exchanged her number for the cash.

"Two thousand dollars!" Norton dazedly repeated to himself. "A small fortune for nothing. Talk about opportunities!"

At his boarding house a message awaited him. He noted with a little tang of apprehension that it was from his employer, whose interests he had temporarily disregarded in order to participate in the drawing. The message was brief and to the point.

Your services are no longer required by this company.

He had lost his chance of a fortune; he had lost his position. That, Norton reflected, was the net result of his long night of waiting, and his chivalrous action toward the unknown girl.

CHAPTER V.

THE LURE OF THE NORTH.

ALREADY Norton had come to realize that in Edmonton a good position was not the acme of human endeavor that it was in the East. Employees, even the most exalted, shifted constantly from one employment to another. Business expansion, the launching of new enterprises, the lure of free land, the easy money in real estate, all made for economic unrest. Positions were not difficult of attainment.

Therefore, notice of his discharge worried him not at all. He had expected it, and, in fact, it was not wholly unwelcome. Already Norton's outlook upon life had undergone a revolution. Why toil a lifetime to acquire the competence that one lucky venture would realize? It was sheer idiocy to condemn all real-estate operators because a few of them were crooks.

The lure of the undeveloped empire to the North stirred new and strange ambitions. Norton's blood was fevered. The possibility of acquiring sudden riches fired an unsuspected mine of restlessness. The bookkeeping job which he had possessed now seemed a small and paltry thing. Why could he not make big money the same as others? Had he not fought his way, penniless, through a great university? Had he not that very afternoon voluntarily relinquished a small fortune? Again he caught himself pondering the identity of the strange girl.

He tried to sit down and calmly plan his future. He could not do it. A consuming unrest drove him into the street toward the business section.

Downtown the streets were full of excited crowds. Number holders were to pick their lots the following morning. That night the numbers were negotiable, like stocks and bonds. Realty offices exhibited their number offerings and did a brisk commission business. Curb brokers dealt in the same commodity. A big auction sale of numbers was advertised to take place in a public hall later in the evening. And the most desirable number of all merely gave the holder first chance to buy four lots in a new subdivision!

Norton was turning his restless footsteps toward the auction sale when the blue motor car that had passed him and Tommy Harrow in the suburbs the previous day swept majestically up the street. His adventure with the veiled girl having created an interest in femininity, Norton glanced at the sole occupant, the daughter of Dick Dexter. He noted perfunctorily that Harrow's appreciation of her beauty was justified.

Then he noted something else which caused him to stand, petrified with amazement, as the car rolled up to the curb and stopped within a few feet of him. The veiled girl of the lottery line was Miss Dexter herself. She beck-

oned to Norton with her head, and, as he approached, held out her hand. "I want to thank you," she said simply. "My name is Dexter—Gale Dexter."

"And mine"—Norton stammered in astonishment—"is Angus Norton."

There was something in the girl's warm handclasp and winning smile which instantly appealed to Norton. It was not her good looks, though for the moment he thought her the most beautiful girl he had ever seen; but, rather, some quality of vitality and the joy of living that seemed fairly to radiate from her.

"I want you to come with me, please," she said in the manner of one accustomed to having her own way with men.

Norton regained something of his self-possession. "Where to?" he inquired, just as if going anywhere with her was the most natural thing in the world.

"Home. I want you to meet mother," the girl replied. "Won't you?" She swung the door of the car open invitingly. "Also to make amends for my horribly selfish conduct in allowing you to give me your place."

"No, indeed! It was my fault that you lost your place." Hand upon the door, Norton paused.

"Come, anyhow—please," she insisted. "We'll talk that over at home."

Norton capitulated. Miss Dexter threaded the car through the crowded streets and presently turned into an esplanade overlooking the broad, green valley of the Saskatchewan.

Norton stole a glance at her. Still in her teens probably, Miss Dexter, unveiled, was a girl who would stand out in any crowd. Her clear complexion held just the faintest tinge of olive. Her eyes were magnetic.

The car swung through a portecochère into parked grounds that set off a stately brick mansion. Norton's quick-eye noted in a far corner, oddly

incongruous in its superb setting of green lawn and shrubbery, a log hut, rough-hewn and primitive as any homesteader's.

Miss Dexter stopped the car at the door, and she and Norton got out.

"This is the gentleman who gave me his place, mother," the girl said to a kindly featured old lady who was doing crochet work on the broad veranda.

"That's right," said Norton, laughing, as Mrs. Dexter rose to greet him. "I caused her to lose her own place. It would have been robbery not to have given her mine."

Miss Dexter went inside and returned with a large envelope. "With the compliments of the veiled lady," she said, as she handed it to Norton.

He tore it open. It contained twenty one-hundred-dollar gold certificates.

"Looks like perfectly good money," he commented smilingly and held it out to the girl.

Miss Dexter put her hands behind her back. "It's yours," she insisted. "Mother wishes you to have it. You should not have given me your place. It was my own fault that I did not return sooner. You must keep it—really."

Norton protested that he could not accept the money, and a vigorous discussion followed.

"Why not divide it?" Mrs. Dexter suggested. "Surely that will be perfectly fair."

Yielding at length to the arguments of Mrs. Dexter and her daughter, Norton finally consented to accept one-half of the money.

After some further conversation, Norton rose to go. "I'll show you the way out," Gale volunteered.

As they went down the steps she said: "I suppose you think I'm rather an odd girl to have taken part in such an affair as that drawing?"

Norton did consider her action un-

usual, but he did not care to say so, and made an evasive answer.

"It was like this," Gale explained as they sauntered along the graveled walk: "Father and I had been having a spirited discussion. He thinks a thousand dollars or so should keep a girl in dresses for a whole year; calls me extravagant. So when a friend told me about the drawing, not dreaming, of course, that I would go into it, I decided to try, and show dad I could make a little money myself. I wouldn't have had any one know for the world; but now that it's all over, I don't care who knows."

"I think you were very enterprising and plucky," returned Norton. "I like people who are not afraid to do things."

They walked along in silence for a moment, until they came to the little, log cabin. "I'll venture to say that little building has a history," Norton remarked.

"It has—rather," his companion agreed.

"Any objection to telling?" he inquired.

"None in the world. It is the cabin that father and mother lived in when they homesteaded this tract."

Norton's interest in his companion received a fillip. She was not ashamed of her parents' humble beginning; she was proud of it, in fact.

"It is remarkable that Mr. Dexter should have been able to homestead land that has grown so in value," Norton pondered. "Some people are wonderfully foresighted, aren't they?"

"Foresighted? Nonsense!" Miss Dexter laughed unaffectedly. "Plain luck; that's all. Father filed on rough land close to the village because he was too lazy to do real farming. Wanted a place, even if the land were poor, so near that he could continue to clerk in a store and do his homestead work at the

same time. At that, he hired men to do most of the work. I believe it pays to be lazy sometimes. Forces one to develop one's mental powers, don't you think?"

Gale Dexter was a bit of a philosopher, Norton reflected; but he liked her all the more for that. "I'm glad you don't believe in work," he said. "It strengthens my resolution."

"To do what?"

"To refrain from work in the future."

In response to the girl's demand for an explanation, Norton told her that he had lost his office position and must choose between seeking another one and earning his living by his brains.

"By all means, quit dull office work," Gale advised him. "Go into real estate. That's the only business for a brainy man these days. Almost everybody is making money at it. A friend of mine resigned an office job three years ago to take up a homestead. Last week he sold it for fifteen thousand dollars, more than he would have earned in ten years at his former occupation."

Norton wondered what sort of a man her friend was. Was it possible that he could do as well? "I believe I would like to go North," he commenced hesitatingly, "if——"

"If what?"

"If you would write me a line of encouragement occasionally," he replied.

By this time they had arrived at the gate. Miss Dexter whipped at a blade of grass with a switch and regarded her dainty footwear. Then she looked up and smiled. "I'll be very glad to send you a line now and then," she said.

"And, perhaps, I may see you again?" Norton queried eagerly.

"By all means," she replied. "I shall be glad to see you again."

Miss Dexter held out her hand. Norton held it a trifle longer than was necessary, blushed at his boldness, mur-

mured a conventional good-by, and left, more exhilarated than he had been since he had won an athletic championship.

The packet of bills in his inner pocket crackled as he stepped briskly along. The golden city of the West had been marvelously kind to him—so far.

In his room at the boarding house Norton recounted his experiences to Tommy Harrow. Harrow had not won anything and was feeling blue.

"Write to you—humph!" he grunted. "Nice mess you'll be in pretty soon. You'll be daffy about a girl that has forty suitors already; fellows that have money, too, let me tell you."

Norton sat down, put his feet on the bureau top, and lighted a cigarette. "I'll not fall in love," he stated, with slow deliberation. "Why should I?" He blew a string of smoke rings. "But, supposing I felt certain that I had met the one girl, do you think I'm the sort of spineless mutt that would let a lack of cash stop me? Wasn't Miss Dexter's father poor as a gopher? What does she—I mean what does any real woman—care about mere money?"

Harrow gave him a pitying look. "Not any more than she cares for her right eye, you fool," he sneered. "A lot you know about girls."

Norton smoked in silence. Suddenly he took his feet down from the bureau. Recollection stung him. Miss Dexter had participated in the drawing because she did not consider one thousand dollars a year a sufficient allowance for personal expenses! Probably it would be just as well that he should not care for her.

He went to bed, but did not fall asleep at once. His mind kept pondering over the events of the day. If a poor man did happen to fall in love with an indulged daughter of dollars what should he do about it? The answer was obvious: Acquire dollars of his own, of course.

When Norton came to think of it, that was what he had set out to do, anyhow. He considered many things that had never troubled him before. Undoubtedly Gale Dexter was the sort of girl he could like. She had promised to write to him. Her suitors were quite numerous, Harrow said. Naturally they would be; moneyed, too.

He rolled over, punched his pillow, and tried to sleep. After some time of mental meandering, he succeeded.

CHAPTER VI.

MONEY NO OBSTACLE.

NORTON awoke next morning alive to the fact that he was jobless. There was, however, a measure of satisfaction in the situation. People who amounted to anything worked for themselves, he reflected.

Long and wistfully he gazed at a map of unexploited northern Alberta that a previous lodger had pinned on the wall. The thought of venturing into a virgin district and hewing out a sturdy independence—as had his Scotch forbears and Miss Dexter's father—appealed to him strangely.

He had told Gale Dexter he was going North. In order to write to her was he not practically compelled to go? Of course, writing to her was scarcely a matter for grave concern; but, aside from that, would it not be better to "get in on the ground floor" of an undeveloped region, where real-estate values must rapidly advance as they had advanced in the Edmonton district? Why not duplicate Mr. Dexter's plan of homesteading near a strategic point that would grow to town or city size and thereby enhance the value of his land?

Norton realized that while ordinary homesteading offered a good living, a quick fortune was not to be made that way. He must choose his homestead with care. Land adjacent to even tiny

centers of population was difficult but not impossible of acquirement.

He wondered if he might not see Miss Dexter once more before leaving. He directed rather hesitant footsteps toward a near-by drug store that boasted a public telephone booth, but on arriving there, concluded that the hour was not propitious.

What could he say to her? Why should he wish to call her up, anyhow? Was Tommy's prediction correct? Was he becoming infatuated about her like forty other suitors? Norton walked back past the telephone booth again, and, without being quite able to decide whether his action was due to bravery or cowardice, continued on downtown.

He visited various places, gleaning what facts he could regarding the undeveloped territory to the north. Again he debated his chances for success in a raw, primeval district where railroads were nonexistent, the cost of life's necessities excessive, and opportunities for earning a living uncertain.

Finally he decided to risk it. His investigation convinced him that a town called Rodiscaw was the most promising point in the new district. He, therefore, purchased a stage ticket and prepared to start on his journey thither the following morning.

It being his last night in the city, Norton attended the theater that evening. He idly scanned the box occupants, and, to his agreeable surprise, caught sight of Miss Dexter.

In her street suit she had been an exceedingly prepossessing young woman. Now, in a low-cut evening dress, she looked a veritable queen. Other ladies in adjoining boxes seemed commonplace by comparison. A faultlessly attired man hovered about her, and Norton caught himself envying him.

As Norton contemplated the vast social and financial gulf that separated him from such a daughter of wealth,

Tommy Harrow's remarks acquired fresh significance. He must not allow himself to fall in love with her. It might be just as well to omit writing that letter and let his growing interest in her die a natural death. It might be just as well not even to look at her again.

By way of satisfying himself that he possessed the will power not to do so, Norton turned his face in another direction. He was rather pluming himself on this feat when a messenger handed him a note from the not-to-be-looked-at object of his cogitations.

Gale had noticed him in the audience, the note said. Could he not spare a moment for a little visit? Renunciation forgotten in a twinkling, Norton obeyed the summons.

Miss Dexter introduced him to her friends, among them a Mr. Masters, the well-groomed man whom Norton had envied from afar.

At the first opportunity Norton told her he intended going North in the morning.

"Then I won't see you any more?" Gale queried, with a delightful little pretense of pique.

Norton looked straight at her. "Do you wish to see me again?" he asked seriously.

"Of course I do," the girl responded with emphasis.

"Then you certainly shall; perhaps more than you will care to," he said. "Doesn't that declaration frighten you?"

Gale shook her head, smiling. "Not a bit," she said.

The curtain rose on the third act and Norton returned to his seat, his determination to have nothing to do with the charming inhabitant of another social sphere rudely shaken. If he wanted really to win a girl of that sort, no paucity of dollars could stop him, he reflected. A man could acquire dollars.

CHAPTER VII.

GLEANING INFORMATION.

NORTON arrived at Rodiscaw, the small town metropolis of the new North, at dusk, weary and worn from two days of racking stage travel over terrible trails.

The hundred miles of country through which he had passed was not good farming land. Even the district surrounding Rodiscaw was too thickly wooded ever to become noted for farming alone. But the town was situated on the southern bend of a great river, thereby affording a water passage upstream three hundred miles to the Peace River country and downstream to Alberta's promising oil and asphalt fields.

For all that vast territory Rodiscaw was the temporary distributing center. One railroad already was in course of construction to connect it with the outside world. Other railroads would enter, the inhabitants believed, and thus the town's future standing as an important center would be clinched. No Rodiscaw booster would admit the possibility of a distributing center growing up elsewhere.

When he alighted from the stage Norton sensed the indescribable feeling of energy and enthusiasm that distinguished Rodiscaw from all other towns he had known in his somewhat limited experience.

Within the past year the somnolent fur-trading village had waked one morning to learn that it was to become a city. Property that could scarcely be given away before leaped tenfold in value. Farms adjoining the town took on the status and value of suburban property. Real-estate men from the cities boomed Rodiscaw to the sky. It was these men who convinced the inhabitants that a great future was in store for them. To a considerable extent, they convinced the country at

large. Some of them even convinced themselves. Outside money flowed into Rodiscaw. Speculators crowded the town.

A hallway cot in a hotel which had been built in five weeks was the best accommodation that Norton could procure.

After a supper that surprised him no less by its excellence than by its high price, he sauntered about the lobby, conversing casually with different men, gleaning what information he could regarding the new country of which Rodiscaw was the center.

Almost always the theme was the same; the prodigious development that one railroad's slow but sure approach had set in motion and the huge importance that the town would presently attain. Optimism filled the air and energized the lives of all.

A corduroy-clad, bronzed young giant planted himself in a chair beside Norton, and, after a little diplomatic urging, launched upon the prevailing topic.

"Three years ago when I hit this burg with about two dollars in my jeans it was a trading post and a darned small one at that," he said. "Newcomers like myself, who thought some sort of crop might be grown around here, were considered clean dippy by the natives. A railroad was talked of, sure enough, but in the same way that we talk of a railroad to Alaska now. Other parts of Alberta might support a fairly large population, the fur traders said, but nothing except fur could ever be harvested north of Edmonton.

"Just the same," he continued, "a few of us newcomers guessed it would do no harm to homestead the vacant government land around the village, even if most of it was swampy and covered with brush, and, believe me, that's where we hit it lucky."

Norton absorbed every word of the

other's narrative. Here, indeed, was a man after his own heart, another Dick Dexter, a living embodiment of the feasibility of his own ambition. "I suppose you got rich like all the others around here?" he queried.

"Oh, sure." The fortunate one grinned. "My old place is surveyed into fifty-foot building lots now. They paid me twenty thousand dollars for it."

"Who did?"

"The real estaters."

"What are they doing with your place?"

The young pioneer grinned. "Selling it as building lots."

"But it isn't building property?" Norton objected.

"What if it isn't? That's the buyers' lookout. I'm not selling it, am I?"

The pioneer lowered his voice. "Between you and me and the gatepost, as the saying is," he continued, "I know that the people who took over my place are selling it dishonestly. They are getting two hundred dollars each for lots not worth over five dollars, because they are situated in a swamp. But should I worry? Not I. It isn't me that's doing the selling, is it? The place isn't mine now. I sold it.

"No, sir," he went on, "if you ever get hold of a homestead close to a boomed town—and there will be other towns boomed in this country—you needn't worry about how to get big money out of it. Turn it over to the real-estate men. If it shows up well on a blue print—where details like swamps, and so forth, can be omitted—they'll pay you a fortune for it and make two fortunes out of it themselves. Because the boobs who buy won't take the trouble to investigate before buying."

Norton pondered the ethics of the case. Of course, his informant had done nothing dishonest. And yet, had he refused to sell to the wildcatters the

latter would be unable to rob foolish persons who had let the real-estate craze obscure their common sense.

Norton thought of Gale Dexter and what money would mean to a suitor for her hand. He wondered if a person who was too honest to sell his land to wildcatters could ever acquire even a modest fortune.

"Why is it that everybody seems so crazy to buy lots?" he asked.

The lucky homesteader considered this question. "I guess it is because so much money has already been made in real estate," he answered. "Practically every moneyed man in Alberta made his stake that way. The suckers think that what has happened before must happen again. They're a lot of sheep. To blazes with 'em! says I. If one kind of grafter don't get their money, another does.

"Got anything in view?" the speaker added, after a pause.

Norton confessed that he had not.

"Then, seeing you are in precisely the same fix that I was in four years ago, I'll just put you wise to something."

"I'd be everlastingly thankful," said Norton.

"Have you ever heard of Peace River Junction?" the stranger inquired.

"No."

"It's where the Mackinaw River joins the Peace. There's going to be a town there some day sure as you're a foot high, because the railroad can't cross the river anywhere else for a hundred miles. Now, if you could procure a homestead up there—eh?"

Norton straightened up in his chair. "Can I? Is the land open to entry?" he asked.

"No, it isn't, thank goodness. But it's liable to be any day now. So what you want to do is this: Hang around the land office like a cat around a basket of fish. As soon as the notice is posted sit right down on the doorstep and stay

there ten days until you can file on the land."

"Ten days!" Norton gasped. "I couldn't do that."

"You'll do worse things than that if you stay in this country. I'll show you how when the time comes."

"By the way," Norton questioned his new-found friend just before he parted from him, later on, "what is this home-stand of yours called? I was walking along Real-estate Row, in Edmonton, the other day and a man wanted to sell me a lot in a subdivision up here called Balmoral Park."

"Didn't buy it, did you?"

Norton shook his head.

"That's a darned good thing. You might as well have thrown your money in the river. Yes, Balmoral Park is what they call my place."

Norton made no comment, and, saying good night, went upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT OPEN TO ENTRY.

NORTON rose early next morning, and, after a hearty breakfast, strolled about the town. Everywhere the merry clamor of hammer and saw betokened unusual building activity. On the main street alone eight commercial buildings were in process of construction, all of them showy, cheap, and flimsy. Only the log buildings of the original fur traders looked substantial.

On the side streets a number of dwellings, most of them shacks, were being built. By the river bank a village of tents housed more numerous arrivals. A crowded Hudson's Bay Company steamer, built like a scow and drawing some twelve inches of water, was getting under way, headed for the Peace River country.

Norton watched it for a while and then returned to the business section, where a cheerful whistling in a real-estate office encouraged him to enter.

"Do I sell lots in Balmoral Park?" The man behind the roll-top desk eyed Norton resentfully. "No, sir; I do not. Why? Got some there you'd like to list for sale?" He grinned maliciously.

Norton gave the man a brief résumé of his experience with the Balmoral agent in Edmonton.

"Selling such stuff is nothing but the rottenest kind of a graft," the realty man assured him. "And, at that, there's other parks and heights and estates two miles farther out. Not one of them is worth a hoot for anything but farming, and most of them are not very good for that. In the end, it's the town that's got to suffer. Supposing, now, that you had bought in Balmoral Park. When you learned you'd been swindled you'd naturally get sore on the town, wouldn't you?"

Norton admitted that such might be the case.

"This town is the busiest little burg in Alberta," the realty man went on. "It's got a commanding location. Its resources are tremendous. We have every reason to hope that railroads other than the one now building will enter our town. And then these cursed wildcatters have to step in and give us a black eye. I wondered at first why the government allowed these real-estate grafters to do business unchecked, but I know now."

Norton naturally asked the reason.

"Because most of the legislators themselves are up to their eyes in real estate," the man replied. "They'll act when public opinion forces them to—maybe—but not before."

He went on to tell Norton that for the price of a Balmoral lot he would sell him a very good piece of building property within four blocks of the post office.

Norton was amazed. "How is it that Balmoral people have been able to sell their stuff?" he inquired.

The realty man shook his head. "It's

because the country has gone crazy about the real-estate game, I guess," he said. "Values have increased to such an extent, thereby making money for thousands of people, that, by misrepresentation, bad stuff can be sold along with good stuff."

"But first buyers in Balmoral have resold at a profit," Norton insisted.

"I dare say they have. Probably it happened like this: The first fools bought the lots that looked best on the blue print. The second batch of fools, having made up their minds to buy, doubtless were willing to pay a premium on the first-choice purchases."

Norton brought out his cigar case. Both men lighted up, and Norton resumed his quest for information. Rodiscaw men, like all town boosters, were only too anxious to give information to strangers.

"I suppose that new towns will spring up on the Peace River when the railroads reach there?" he queried.

"Undoubtedly," agreed his informant.

"I don't suppose any one knows just where?"

The real-estate man shook his head. "If you could guess correctly you'd make your fortune in short order," he said.

The land office had not opened yet when Norton left the realty office, so he sauntered about the town, planning his next step. He entered the office of the board of trade and examined a map. It seemed reasonable that one or more railroads would, in the not distant future, build to and beyond the Peace River. As the river was navigable, a town must necessarily rise wherever steel crossed it. Nothing could be more likely than that the railroad would cross at the most easily bridged point.

At the land office a busy clerk answered his query. "You can't file at the junction of the Peace and Macki-

naw Rivers because land there is not open to entry," he said.

Norton learned, however, that a survey had been made and the land might be posted any day. He resolved to be the first to file.

He sought out Tom Harrison, the homesteader of Balmoral Park, whom he had met the previous evening, and asked his advice.

"Good for you!" Harrison said. "Here's the way to go about filing at the junction: First of all, have a talk with the town constable, see? Promise him a chunk of money if you get what you're after. Hang around the land office all the time. The minute the notice goes up flop right down on the doorstep and stay there. If you think you can bribe one of the clerks to tip you off about the notice do that, too. When you get your position send word to Constable Coutts, as you've got to wait ten days before filing. He'll get a man to relieve you for a few hours each day. But make your relief man sign a contract so he can't double cross you, see?"

Thanking Harrison for his advice, Norton went to see the town constable. "You did the right thing to come to me," the officer assured him. "I'll get a man to relieve you." He said nothing about remuneration for his trouble and Norton did not mention the subject. It was all right to enlist assistance, but it was no part of his code to bribe an officer.

CHAPTER IX.

AN AWKWARD QUESTION.

THE greater part of the next few days Norton spent around the land office. The morning of the fifth day he arrived early, as usual, to find four men ahead of him. He glanced through the window at the bulletin board, and an uneasy feeling stabbed him as he perceived thereon the expected notice. "I guess you win," he remarked resignedly

to the man first in line. "What are you going to file on?"

"On Pine Creek, six miles south of here," the other replied.

Norton could have shouted for joy. He stepped in behind the last man. At ten o'clock the four entered the office, leaving Norton alone on the doorstep, jubilant at having achieved his desire, but confronted with the problem of holding his position ten days and ten nights.

He sent word to Constable Coutts. That worthy presently appeared with a man who, for twenty-five dollars, agreed to relieve Norton six hours out of each twenty-four. Norton paid him a retainer of ten dollars and got a receipt.

Half an hour later a land seeker read the new notice, glanced at Norton enviously, and sat down behind him. Another took up a position. A fourth fortune hunter figured that the three men on the doorstep must have good reasons for their heroic intentions and took his place in the line.

Day after day Norton held his position for eighteen hours or more. The nights were chilly. His limbs frequently became so cramped that he could scarcely move when his relief arrived. Occasionally he snatched a wink of sleep on the doorstep.

Mere rumor gradually gained the status of solid fact as it traveled from mouth to mouth until Norton came to be looked upon as the agent of some mysterious "higher-up" person who, Aladdinlike, could command towns to rise at will. Norton did not gainsay the rumor. If others chose to regard him as a person of superior knowledge he could see no reason for disillusioning them. The whole town began to talk about him. The line stretched half a block. A news item regarding the long wait appeared in an Edmonton paper.

Norton was glad to see that item.

He knew that Gale Dexter would read it. She would learn then that he was no common clod; that he possessed the brains and will power to accomplish something in the world. After achieving his object he would write to her. The resolution to renounce her acquaintance as a dangerous thing had long since been shelved.

At last came the night before the morning when perseverance would reap its well-earned reward. Down the long line the land seekers huddled in blankets in every limp attitude of utter weariness. Overhead a pale moon rode the heavens. Stars sparkled like diamonds on a background of purple. A chill night breeze crooned a soothing lullaby to sleepy mortals, a lullaby pierced occasionally by the weird, moon-inspired invocation of some half-savage dog.

Near the line, in the shadow of a warehouse, three furtive figures drew together. They conversed in whispers, and one pointed toward Norton. Presently three pairs of moccasined feet moved swiftly and silently to the head of the line. A savage onslaught, a sleep-numbed, ineffectual resistance, and, almost before they had realized what had happened, Norton and two of his companions found themselves in the gutter, bruised and shaken, while three grinning vandals, braced for battle, occupied their hard-won places.

Stinging with chagrin and anger, Norton gathered together his sleepy wits and rushed upon the usurpers. A stick came down on his head, and he wobbled back into the roadway. His companions, after similar treatment, quit cold.

Norton pulled himself together and renewed his attack. Crouched, left guard protecting his face in boxing attitude, he rushed. The savage joy of feeling an adversary crumple under his fists was his. But, unarmed, his attack availed him nothing. A club cracked on his skull again, and, minutes later, he

picked himself up from the dust of the street and dragged himself to his hotel.

He applied first aid to his injuries and betook himself to the home of the constable. "No need to worry at all," that official assured him. "We've got so many witnesses to prove you are entitled to the place that the land agent simply can't let those roughnecks get away with their scheme. I'll fix it for you."

Before the land agent next morning Norton marshaled an array of witnesses, including the constable, his companions of the line, and his relief man. The evidence was conclusive; the three usurpers were deprived of their places and the rightful possessors restored.

Norton stepped up to the counter, cuts and bruises forgotten in the thought of ultimate victory. He was sworn in to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

"Name?" asked the clerk, beginning to fill in the required form.

Norton gave it.

"Nationality?"

"Canadian."

"You can state on oath that you have examined the land you propose to take up and have found it suitable for agriculture?" The clerk singsonged the questions as if the answers were a matter of indifference to him.

"What's that?" Norton flinched, as from a blow. He did not know that the oath regarding examination was required.

"You can't file if you haven't seen the land," said the clerk. "Yes or no?"

Norton glanced around at his companions in dumb despair. Should he relinquish his hard-won victory and shatter his high hopes on a red-tape technicality? After all, he could say yes; such evasion could scarcely be called perjury; merely the natural result of absurd regulations.

"We haven't all day," snapped the clerk.

Norton gripped the counter. If he answered in the negative he must relinquish a probable fortune; relinquish his chance to win Gale Dexter. In a flash he realized how much he wished to win her, how much depended upon the answer to the clerk's question.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The succeeding chapters of this novel, beginning with Chapter X., following the synopsis introduced for new readers, will appear in the next issue of *TOP-NOTCH*, dated and out September 1st.

No Chance for Him

AT Cupid's shrine I worshiped, but now I only scoff. I fell in love with the "Hello!" girl. Alas! she cut me off.

And then I met the chorus girl, as stylish as a queen. I asked her to be mine. She said: "You're not on in this scene."

The girl behind the counter next I tried without demur. She smiled, and replied sweetly: "Next's the h'art department, sir."

I thought I'd booked the cycling girl; I'd chosen her at random. Alas! it seemed, from what she said, she didn't care for "tandem."

I might have gained the typist's hand, but didn't try to win it, because I found she wrote—and talked—a hundred words a minute.

The circus girl quite put me off when we'd fixed up the thing. She jilted me, but wrote to say she's sticking to "the ring."

The Owner's Label

MRS. BRAGGE: "I want to call the new house which I have just bought some name which will let people know that it belongs to me. What would you suggest, dear?"

Miss Witt: "How would 'Iona House' do?"

Top-Notch Talk

By the Editor

BAD STORIES BY GOOD AUTHORS.



OW and then a literary agent, with glowing countenance, brings us a bad story written by a good author; that is to say, an author who has won distinction. Sometimes the agent is surprised, grieved, bewildered, when we hand such a manuscript back to him with our compliments.

We have no fondness at all for the bad story by a famous author; we prefer just the good story for itself, and nothing else. Time was when the poor work of writers who had achieved renown could be "put across" with greater success than the undertaking is attended with to-day. We found out some time ago that the story had become the thing of first consideration with readers. It occurred to us that the day had come in the life of magazines when circulation would follow the story. That turned out to be a good guess. The circulation of TOP-NOTCH has increased steadily from the first issue. It is now very large.

Well-known writers of fiction are among our regular contributors; some

of the distinguished ones are only occasional contributors. But whichever they are, they know that if they haven't got the story, it is hardly worth while offering it to TOP-NOTCH. They feel equally sure that when they have a good story there is no place where it will receive a warmer welcome than in this office.

Nothing delights us more than to receive a story by a good author when it is a good story. There is keen disappointment in the receipt of a bad story by a good author. But authors have their off days, just as every worker has his off days. Fortunately for the author, there are places where his name will enable him to dispose of the products of his off days. Lucky for him that all readers of fiction magazines do not insist, issue after issue, that stories—real stories, and nothing else—be told for their enjoyment. TOP-NOTCH readers are that way, and the fact has to do with our editorial unfondness for bad stories by good authors



"MEN OF STEEL."

IT gives us great pleasure to announce that the leading novel for the next issue is a good story by a good author. It is called "Men of Steel," and the author is Johnston McCulley, who won his spurs long ago as a teller of vivid tales. In this story you get him at his

best, in the opinion of several of us who have read the manuscript. The background of it is railroad construction, and the big human drama that is unfolded has for actors real men, who, good or bad, as they may be, certainly live up to the title, "Men of Steel."

"THE GRIP OF THE GAME."

THIS is a new serial novel by Burt L. Standish; the opening chapters will appear in the next issue. It is one of the Lego Lamb series of baseball tales. Everybody who read the preceding novel of the series will hail this announcement as good news. Those who did not read the first Lego story, but know the author's work—and who

does not?—will look forward to a treat. You are going to meet a lot of old friends in this latest novel of Mr. Standish—Lefty Locke and Brick King among them, I think—and you are going to get a baseball story written in the best vein of the author who has no superior, no peer, in this branch of fiction.



"FILM STRATEGY."

A GOOD picture-play story is what we are always looking for, but seldom find. We've got it in "Film Strategy," as you will see in the next issue. The author is Thomas O'Halloran, who gave us, some time ago, one

of the best tales of the silent drama ever written, "The Glory of the Film." His latest product in this line is a novelette of generous length. It sheds a new light on the untold possibilities of the picture-play industry.



"THE LUCKY BUNGLER."

HERE is another novelette of generous length that you will get in the number next to come to you, and a good one, by *two* good authors—Ethel and James Dorrance. You know them best for their Western ranch tales. "The Lucky Bungler" is a far cry from the plains, the corral, and the herds that have filled so many of their stirring pictures. It is a newspaper story, and one

that reveals in its every phase the hands of those who know. Both authors are ex-journalists of the big-town type. Well may this bit of fiction be called an inside job. Here is a story so gripping in dramatic interest that it takes you at the first line and never lets go of you until the close. Decidedly one of the strongest tales by the Dorrances that has ever been published.



"THAT TERRIBLE PRETZEL."

THIS is a boxing story by J. A. Fitzgerald, and, of course, a fun-maker all the way. Humorists are a solemn lot of people in private life; they take themselves so seriously that they think they need a vacation in summer, just like other people. When a humorist is bent upon loafing, it is dangerous to disturb him with the thought of work. But that was done, with the

result that this story has been taken from him, shrieking. Nevertheless, it is quite likely to treat you to smiles, even laughter.

Among the several other features of the next number is a tennis tale by Tom S. Elrod, and—well, I find I have come to the end of my space; that is, if I am going to give your letters any chance in this "talk."

A Coming Event.

FROM Mr. Thomas F. Mills, of Lombard, Illinois, we have this:

I enjoy TOP-NOTCH immensely, and think it better than any other fiction magazine. "The Man Unafraid" was great. In "Diamond Light" the author doesn't seem to know much about automobiles or motion-picture films. But hang the knocks! The magazine is swell, and there's no use of any one's saying otherwise. Mr. and Mrs. Dorance are certainly great. Bertram Lebhar should be given a free rein.

But the main purpose of this letter is, besides expressing my sincere good will toward the magazine, to request a certain kind of story, one which I have never seen in TOP-NOTCH. Can you give us a story of printing, with the plot laid right among the cases and galleys, and have the plot contained in some detail of composition or presswork? Let us fairly be able to smell the ink and hear the click of the rollers as they go over the form. I am sure that there will be many other readers who would enjoy a story of this kind. Every wish of success for good old TOP-NOTCH.

It is nearly time for another story about a printing office. One that we published had its plot laid right among the cases and galleys, but it did not go, so far as to enable the readers to smell the ink or hear the click of the rollers. The wish that Mr. Lebhar be given a free rein is one that our readers have seen realized for some time. This popular writer of fiction is just now closing a long novel for TOP-NOTCH, and it will appear in an early issue. It is a big drama of circus life—the best thing by far that he has ever written.



Player or Author?

CRITICISM of a point in a baseball story is made by Mr. C. R. Conway, of Ackley, Iowa, whose letter is as follows:

Although I am not a regular subscriber to your magazine, I get every issue at a news stand. I would not lose out on it for anything.

The story in the June 15th issue, "No Run for Their Money," by J. A. Fitzgerald,

was good; but he made one error. On page 75 he told us that after two were out the batter hit for two bases; the next man singled and stole second, thereby placing men on second and third. The next batter hit a high fly into the field, and the runners held their bases to see if the fielder would catch the fly. Now, the proper play, with two out, would have been for both runners to start for the home plate as fast as possible, because if the fielder caught the ball the side would be retired, and if he didn't there was a possibility of the ball being fielded in time to prevent the run. As I am a baseball fan and watch the game closely, I don't see how Mr. Fitzgerald came to make such a mistake. I hope that this criticism will be taken in the right way.

Baseball players are no more infallible than authors; the ball player does not always do the thing that he ought to do at a given time. In relating the story of a game, it is the author's business to describe "bonehead" plays as well as clever plays.

Most assuredly, in the circumstances mentioned, the player at third should have started for the home plate, since to do so involved no risk. If the fly was caught, the side would be retired. With two out, nothing could be gained by the runner at third waiting there before starting for home, to see if the fly were caught. But as Fitzgerald tells the story, that is just what the player did, thus making an error.

The critic's mistake lies in the assumption that no player would make such an error, and that an author who records it must himself be guilty of a slip. It was not contended in this story that the teams engaged were composed of players to whom mistakes were impossible.



Wants Salesman Stories.

AN interesting suggestion comes from Mr. Tom Page, of Perry, New York. In the course of his letter he says:

I have no fault to find with TOP-NOTCH. I like it well enough to buy every issue,

but, as you ask for suggestions, and use them sometimes, I am sending the following:

Can you not get a series of stories based on original selling schemes, with a clever specialty salesman as the hero. Let him sell sewing machines, for instance, and make a success at it, winning out over competitors through his personality and original ideas. I know of no other line of work so rich in educational, as well as interesting, possibilities.

Steve Blake is a hustler keeping company with a lot of cranks, yet he is popular. Why? My theory is that your readers like a good salesman story, and Blake's salesmanship outbalances the rubbish that goes with the story. I wish TOP-NOTCH a long and prosperous career.

The popularity of the various "salesmen stories" we have published shows that many readers agree with our correspondent in Perry, New York. We have tales of that sort on hand, and they will be published from time to time.



He Enters a Protest.

IT sometimes happens that a reader likes a story, or a series of stories, but is not in sympathy with one or more of the characters. Here is a case in point, set forth by Mr. Daniel Bowers, of Washington Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota. In his letter he says, in part:

I am one of the fortunate persons that have read every number of TOP-NOTCH since its birth. I start in at the first page of the magazine and read every word to the end, serials, poems, jokes, talks, and everything else in the way of reading matter.

I like the stories by B. Standish, Harold de Polo, and, in fact, of all your authors. I haven't read all of "Golden Isle" yet, but isn't it a peach? Some of the stories I can see through from the beginning, and I have a vague idea of how "Golden Isle" will end, but I have to admit that Costello has me puzzled.

And here I protest against Boltwood of Yale. I don't know exactly why, but I dislike Roger Boltwood. The stories themselves are excellent.

Most heroes win their fistie battles, but have to fight to do so. But Boltwood is invincible, and knocks his opponents down without half trying. I suppose if Roger Boltwood met six Jess Willards, a couple of dozen Jack Johnsons, a few hundred Frank Morans, and half the German army, he'd calmly knock them down one after the other.

The first part of "By Right of Wrong" I found kind of dry, but I'm glad I did, so I could read the last two parts. They were great. Success to you and good old TOP-NOTCH!

Stories should ring true, except when they are frankly emancipated from the realities of life. This is the first letter about the Boltwood tales that has contained criticism of this sort. Our readers generally find the leading character drawn in convincing lines. Of course a man may be a hero without "licking all creation" with one hand; that is not at all necessary. And Mr. Standish is too seasoned an author to fall into the error of painting his heroes in such dazzling colors.



Sticks in His Thumb.

A STEADY reader who wishes to be known in print only as "X. Y. Z." of Cheney, Spokane County, Washington, sends this:

I read all of the "Talks," and thought I'd just stick in my thumb. I think T.-N.'s rightly named. Please have Ethel and James Dorrance get busy on an extra-long, complete story of the horse ranches and the Mexican border. Have the Mexican bandits run off the choice black horses and the people, and let the owners and herders go after them. A clever tale could be built around a love story based on that principle. It would take well on account of border life now.

Tell McNeill to cut out the Humming Bird and let him graduate. Get him busy on a good sport story. His cleverness with the Humming Bird shows that he could build a strong, interesting sport story.

Why not carry out Mr. William K. Loester's idea? I'm sure it would be to the betterment of T.-N.

My favorites are Standish, Wynn, Boston, Treynor, Mr. and Miss Dorrance, and Lehar. Fitzgerald writes some good stories. I hope to see a long story built around that little idea of mine in the near future. Many well wishes.

We are glad to say that this number contains a tale of the Mexican border, though not written by Ethel and James Dorrance. Mr. Standish is the author. The suggestion is a good one, however, and we have taken it under consideration.

Here and There.

READERS in New Jersey, especially those resident in the vicinity of Newark, have been writing us for an actual-place tale in connection with the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of that city, which is being celebrated. We have thought it a good suggestion from the first, and began casting about for the right author to choose for the work of writing such a story. Well, Albert Payson Terhune looked good to us, so we asked him to do it. He answered that no job of story building could give him greater pleasure; that to write a tale about Newark would be for him a labor of love as well as pride, since Newark was his birthplace; that he first saw the light

in that then quaint old city some time after the Civil War. He has just finished the story, and it looks now as if we shall be able to run it in the September 15th number.

FROM a reader of Transcona, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Mr. Jacob D. Ferris, come complimentary expressions for the Northwest Mounted Police tales printed in TOP-NOTCH, with the customary request for more, along with a bouquet for our baseball stories.

LETTERS from various points differ as to the degree of liking expressed for the tennis stories we have been printing. Some readers say they don't care for a tennis story unless it is made good and strong; others declare that they like any old kind of a story so long as it is a tennis story. This latter view, of course, is that of an enthusiast for the game, pure and simple. Our own idea is that a tennis story should be just as strong, so far as the human interest that pervades it goes, as any other kind of a story. And we judge from your letters, taking them all in all, that such a story is the kind that will please most readers.

WHERE WE ALL GET TOGETHER

to make the magazine brighter, more entertaining and better in every way; where you come in as well as the editors and authors. It is in "Top-Notch Talk."

Send along your letters, whether they contain praise or censure. If you have a bouquet toss it to the author, but if you have only a big stick for him don't be afraid to wield it. All we care for is that you be frank, well-intentioned and to the point.

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Inside back cover

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Back cover